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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



June 11

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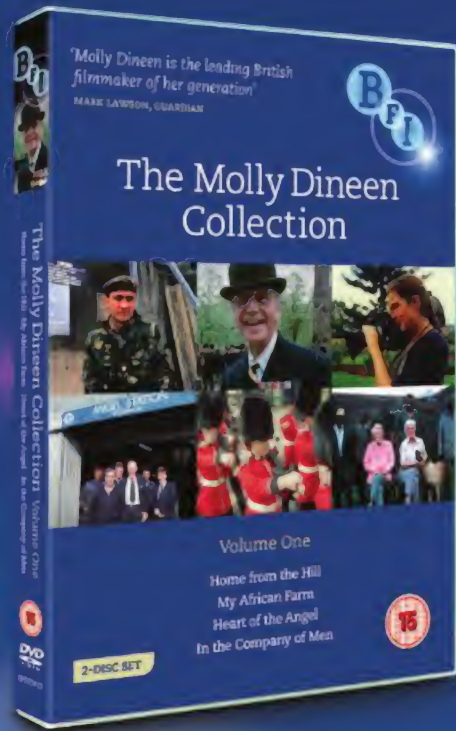
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'13 Assassins'

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's
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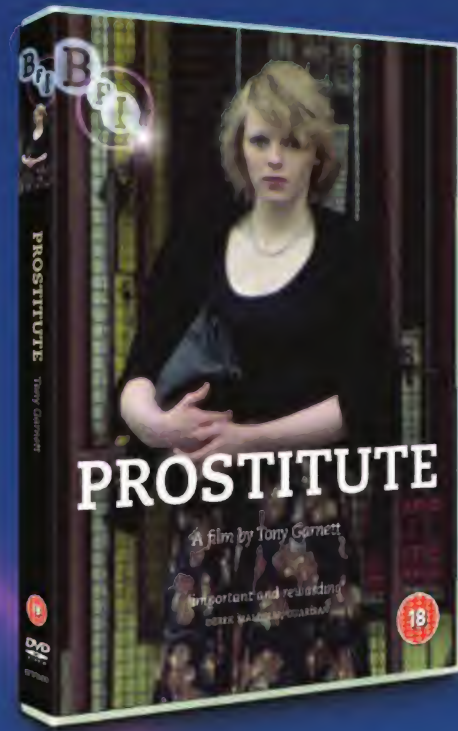
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COVER

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Welcome. ‘Good morning Africaaaa!’ one can imagine the DJ saying into the ear of Adam, left, the put-upon subject of Mahamat-Saleh Haroun’s *A Screaming Man* (see p.34) played by Youssouf Djaoro, before he segues to routinely grim news about the perpetual civil war in Chad. There have been both hopeful and terrible mornings in North Africa lately, which will find many resonances in Rachid Bouchareb’s epic *Outside the Law* (p.38) about the Algerian liberation struggle as fought by three brothers in France, far left. By contrast, a more bucolic and philosophical approach to struggle can be found in Italy in Michelangelo Frammartino’s *Le quattro volte* (p.44), as perfect a modest film as can be imagined. And we pay tribute to a crucial pioneer of the ‘Direct Cinema’ documentary, the late Richard Leacock (p.42), whom I met by chance once in a café in Brittany. Well met, one and all. ♦♦ **Nick James**

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BACK IN CINEMAS MAY 27

NICK JAMES

THE PARADIGM CASE



The announcement of the Cannes Competition line-up is always a dramatic moment in the film world – except, maybe, for those in Hollywood. Every other interested party stops what they're doing in order to spend a moment

absorbing its significance. This year's list can be read two ways and for the same reason: if you're an out-and-out auteurist, it's a very strong-looking programme, but if you're hoping for a seismic shift in film culture you might feel frustrated that it's the usual auteurist suspects who provide that feeling of strength.

Pedro Almodóvar (with *The Skin I Live In*), Nuri Bilge Ceylan (*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*), the Dardenne brothers (*Boy with a Bike*), Aki Kaurismäki (*Le Havre*), Nanni Moretti (*We Have a Pope*), Paolo Sorrentino (*This Must Be the Place*) and Lars von Trier (*Melancholia*) are all Cannes regulars. Terence Malick (*The Tree of Life*) and Lynne Ramsay (*We Need to Talk About Kevin*) probably would be if they were more prolific. Miike Takashi (*Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai*) and Nicolas Winding Refn (*Drive*) are the maverick auteurs of considerable experience who have broken into the competition for the first time.

There are two left-field debuts: Markus Schleizer's *Michael*, which is about a man in his thirties and the ten-year-old boy he kidnaps and imprisons; and Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty*, an

erotic tale of high-class prostitution seemingly inspired (if the trailer's anything to go by) by the French erotic classic *Histoire d'O*. Schleizer has been a close collaborator of Michael Haneke (as a casting director), and Julia Leigh arrives under the sponsorship of Jane Campion, so the feeling that Cannes remains a family affair is intact. And the programme's impressiveness is further underlined when you see that the likes of Gus Van Sant (with *Restless*), Bruno Dumont (*Hors Satan*) and Hong Sangsoo (*The Day He Arrives*) have all accepted berths in the Un Certain Regard second strand.

For Cannes, then, the auteur remains the important element in cinema, just as it is for *Sight & Sound* – even in an issue with the headline 'Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex'. In this issue, Nick Roddick's Mr Busy column (see p.13) predicts, correctly, that if you, "Flip back a few pages to the cover... and count the directors' names... just over a quarter of the words will be directors' first or second names." His beef this month is that auteurism in criticism and academia is a rigid and limiting orthodoxy. He has a point and he argues it well, but I'm not going to labour it here. What interests me more, in the light of our choice of 75 mainstream films from the last 30 years (see p.16), is whether or not we should ever expect – or want – the Cannes-auteurist orthodoxy to shift.

That depends on how cinema weathers its transmutations of technological form and delivery – the digitisation of the production and distribution processes alongside the proliferation of new platforms and formats. The effects of these continue to be a source of anxiety but it remains unclear yet whether, as some have predicted, they will lead to a paradigm shift in how cinema works as an international cultural and industrial phenomenon. The paradigm that everyone continues to operate under remains that created by the generation of cinephiles who grew to adulthood in the 1960s and 70s, which has auteurism at its heart. And yet if you look back at the writings of cinephile critics of that era, they were interested in a much broader range of cinema and seem much less defensive about arthouse films than this generation.

In that context you could regard this year's Cannes selection as a bastion against the forces of change. Which means that we'll only know there has been a paradigm shift when, for better or worse, some ultra-sharp, writer-driven, actor-dominated comedy of the *Up in the Air* or *The Devil Wears Prada* ilk is actually prepared to take its chances in the Cannes Competition, rather than taking the untroubled light-relief Out of Competition place often allotted to such films.

If you're hoping for a seismic shift in film culture, you might feel frustrated that it's the usual auteurist suspects who provide the feeling of strength at Cannes



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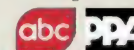
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THE BIGGER PICTURE



Back in the USSR

Any cinephile or film studies student can cite the films of the great Soviet cinema of the 1920s and 30s – groundbreaking epics such as Sergei Eisenstein's 'The Strike' or Alexander Dovzhenko's 'Arsenal'. Too often today, however, the films are read about rather than seen, their glorious compositions glimpsed only in stirring stills like the one from 'Arsenal' (above) or 'Battleship Potemkin' (right). But they retain

their impact more than 80 years later, and are back on the big screen – alongside some lesser known films such as Lev Kuleshov's satirical comedy 'The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks' – as part of the 'Kino: Russian Film Pioneers 1909-1957' season, which plays at London's BFI Southbank from May, launching a seven-month celebration of Russian cinema.



BFI STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

Spanish master

Jonathan Rosenbaum *voyages into the elusive and intriguing worlds created by Spanish filmmaker Pere Portabella*

Among the lost continents of cinema – major films and artists that have perpetually eluded our grasp because they fall outside the usual institutional frameworks that we depend upon to ‘keep up’ with cinema – there are few contemporary figures more neglected than Catalan filmmaker Pere Portabella.

Born into a family of industrialists in Barcelona in 1929, Portabella has remained closely tied to that city’s art scene for most of his life, especially as a patron and friend of other Catalan artists. One of these was Joan Miró, the focus of a major retrospective at the Tate Modern this summer and the subject of five of Portabella’s shorter films from the late 1960s and early 70s. (The two I’m most familiar with are *Miró L’Altre*, chronicling the artist’s painting and subsequent erasing of a mural at the Colegio de Arquitectos de Catalunya, and *Miró 37/Aidez L’Espagne*, which similarly explores a ‘making’ and ‘unmaking’, this time of Spain itself during the mid 1930s, via newsreel footage.)

Portabella’s relation to cinema has taken many different shapes. It started during the long reign of Francisco Franco, with Portabella producing Carlos Saura’s first feature in 1959, *Los Golfos*, swiftly followed by an early Marco Ferreri effort, *El Cochecito*. As one of the two Spanish producers of *Viridiana* (1961) – Luis Buñuel’s first Spanish feature, made towards the end of his extended career as a Mexican exile – he had the satisfaction of seeing the highly provocative feature win the Palme d’Or at Cannes, and then the frustration of having his passport confiscated as punishment for his involvement.

Meanwhile, Portabella was one of three credited co-writers on Francesco Rosi’s feature about bullfighting, *The Moment of Truth* (1965). He started making unclassifiable films of his own, often with surreal aspects, beginning in 1967 with the short *Don’t Count on Your Fingers*, followed a year later by a feature, *Nocturno 29*, whose ‘29’ stood for the number of years Franco had by then held power. In keeping with that impertinent title, these films and those immediately following them, such as the even more radical *Vampir Cuadecuc* (1971, pictured) and *Umbracle* (1972), were originally shown in Spain only clandestinely. (The latter film included Catalan dialogue, a language



In the lost continents of cinema, few contemporary figures are more neglected than Catalan filmmaker Pere Portabella

then forbidden in the country.)

These were the first two Portabella films I saw, and I’ve been a devoted fan ever since. *Vampir Cuadecuc* – still in some respects my favourite – sees Portabella very unconventionally filming in black and white the shooting of Jesús Franco’s very conventional colour movie *Count Dracula* (1970), starring Christopher Lee. The material is submitted to a great deal of processing in visual textures and accompanied by a kind of *musique concrète* by Carles Santos, consisting of such elements as jet planes, drills, operatic arias, kitschy muzak and sinister electronic drones.

Often encompassing both the fictional vampire story and diverse non-fictional details involving props, actors and settings within the same camera movements, *Vampir Cuadecuc* maintains a kind of wit and lyricism that are carried over into the more varied materials of *Umbracle*, which might be regarded as Portabella’s own *L’Age d’or* (Buñuel’s 1930 film). These include a clown act, a statement about censorship, more Christopher Lee, found footage ranging from silent American slapstick to a 1948 Spanish propaganda feature, documentary tours of a shoe store and an assembly line of plucked chickens, and diverse narrative interludes subjected to aggressive editing.

Given Portabella’s tendency to elude most of the usual generic and commercial classifications, often while letting extended periods elapse between projects, it was hard to keep track of his work after that, at least until recently. (A long-awaited DVD

box-set, including most or all of his films to date, is slated to surface later this year.) Portabella’s most important films since 1972 have been *Informe General* (1976), a nearly three-hour political inventory of Spain filmed shortly after Franco’s death, and two ambitious features, *Warsaw Bridge* (1990) and *The Silence Before Bach* (2007). It’s important to add that (given the interval between *Informe General* and *Warsaw Bridge*) in 1977 Portabella was elected state senator in Spain’s first democratic election, which led to his participation in drafting the new Spanish constitution and assisting Spain’s entry into the European Common Market. (A complete account of his career and films can be found at his excellent website, pereportabella.com.)

Portabella’s profile as a political figure, as well as a filmmaker, has also entailed a widening array of interests in his last two features. Some of the major elements in *Warsaw Bridge* include: operas and concerts, a biology lecture, a novel, a swanky party, cooking, a forest fire and sex. All of these deftly interface into something resembling – though never quite arriving at – a single narrative. And *The Silence Before Bach*, while featuring stunning performances of music by the composer, traverses several centuries and countries while exploring numerous interfacing topics.

■ *The Pere Portabella season runs at London’s Tate Modern from 13 May to 31 July*

● **Xavier Giannoli**, the French director of 2006’s *The Singer*, with Gérard Depardieu and Cécile de France, reteams with de France for *Talk Show*, a self-written story about a man (played by Mathieu Amalric) who unwittingly becomes famous through a mistake in the media.

● **Pascale Ferran**, the director of 2006’s *Lady Chatterley*, is to direct *Bird People*, a story co-scripted by Guillaume Breaud.

● **Pen-Ek Ratanaruang**, the Thai director of *Ploy*, *Nymph* and *Last Life in the Universe*, is at work on an as-yet untitled noir crime-drama about a hit man, based on a novel by Win Lyovarin.

● **Bradley Rust Gray** follows his 2009 indie charmer *The Exploding Girl* with *Jack and Diane*, a New York-set fantasy story about two teenage girls who start a love affair, the awakened sexual desire giving Diane werewolf-like visions.

● **George Clooney** is set to produce and possibly direct a film based on a 2009 Washington Post article, *The \$700 Billion Man*. The story centres on Neel Kashkari, an inexperienced aide to Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, who fled to an isolated cabin in California following the government bailout in 2008. Kashkari later found himself thrown to the wolves in Congress following the crisis.

● **Vincent Gallo**, who won acclaim for his performance in Jerzy Skolimowski’s *Essential Killing*, is set to take two roles, in two languages, in an Italian version of *The Legend of Kaspar Hauser*, directed by Davide Manuli that’s apparently not a straight remake of the Herzog film. The Kaspar Hauser character is to be played by Silvia Calderoni, with Gallo as the Pusher and the Sheriff, speaking Italian and English respectively.

● **Roman Polanski** (pictured), who recently wrapped filming on the New York set of *Carnage*, about two sets of middle class parents (played by Jodie Foster, John C. Reilly, Kate Winslet and Christoph Waltz) who meet after their children have fought at school, is developing *True Crime*, based on a 2008 New Yorker article about a Polish man who was found dead in the Oder river in December 2000. The crime was eventually linked back to Krystian Bala, a Polish intellectual whose book *Amok* bore eerie similarities to the murder.



Sex and the single girl

French coming-of-age drama 'Love like Poison' shows great promise, says **James Bell**

It was a Serge Gainsbourg song that provided the unlikely inspiration for *Love like Poison*, the debut feature from 31-year-old French director Katell Quillévéré. The film follows the sexual awakening of a 14-year-old Catholic girl named Anna (newcomer Clara Augarde), who is about to be confirmed, and lives in a small Breton town with her recently divorced mother Jeanne (Lio) and grandfather Jean (Michel Galabru).

"The literal translation of the song is 'the violent poison'," explains Quillévéré. "Each of the characters has their own poison – a tension that's pulling them in two directions at once. It's about those things in life that you're attracted to, but which cause you to suffer, like what people tend to experience when they fall in love for the first time."

With its gentle, reflective tone, *Love like Poison* is a deceptively slight film, and its coming-of-age theme is hardly a new one for French cinema, but Quillévéré's promise is apparent in the subtle way in which she sidesteps the predictable. It's a film whose empathetic vision of early adolescence brings to mind Austrian director



The passion: Anna (Clara Augarde) and Father François (Stefano Cassetti)

Valeska Grisebach's debut feature *Be My Star* (2001). Within French cinema, Quillévéré cites Maurice Pialat's lacerating realism as an influence, particularly his *A nos Amours* (1983). Clara Augarde even bears an uncanny resemblance to the young Sandrine Bonnaire in Pialat's film.

"Aside from the physical resemblance, there's a similar spirit," says Quillévéré. "Clara's not a classical beauty – there are moments when she looks beautiful and moments where she looks unattractive; moments when she seems like a child and moments when she seems like a woman. But that's the reality of adolescence – it's a fluid time."

Anna's growing self-realisation is the central thread of the film, but Quillévéré also lingers on the secondary characters – the adults who Anna begins to understand more fully: her mother whose marriage has recently broken down, or the village priest Father François (Stefano Cassetti, best known for playing the lead in Cédric Kahn's *Roberto Succo*), who has conflicts of faith over his attraction to Jeanne, an attraction reciprocated but not consummated. "It's possible to understand things about Anna even when leaving her out of a scene, by getting to her through the others," says Quillévéré. The depths of Father François's

character are suggested in a scene where he joins in a game of football. "That scene is a real turning point," says Quillévéré. "Up until then he had been seen as a man of weighty words but not much physicality. It needed a scene where he doesn't say anything, but his body and movement does. It's at that moment that he takes on erotic connotations for Jeanne. He's sweating; it's uncontrolled – and uncontrollable – like desire."

Anna's dilemmas are of course age-old, something suggested by the film's use of traditional folk songs, all sung by women. "They had to be women's voices, because the question of motherhood is so important in the film," explains Quillévéré. "Mother/daughter relationships are very fraught during adolescence; often the mother is approaching menopause just as the daughter is starting to menstruate, so there's this mirroring and at the same time this conflict. It's a taboo subject, but I can't imagine there's a mother anywhere who hasn't at one time looked slightly askance at her daughter's changing body. It brings with it feelings of jealousy and at the same time love and concern. It was that ambivalence I wanted to put across."

■ 'Love like Poison' is released on 13 May, and is reviewed on page 69

THE NUMBERS

Herzog's ship comes in

Werner Herzog's film about cave paintings has proved an unlikely hit, says **Charles Gant**

Anyone who doubts that Werner Herzog is experiencing a late second wind of popularity should take a look at the UK grosses for his latest film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. Nearly four decades after early hits *Aguirre*, *Wrath of God* and *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, and nearly three decades since *Fitzcarraldo*, the 68-year-old has now put behind him the long years in the commercial wilderness when his work was mostly seen at film festivals and on television. But even his most loyal supporters will be surprised that his documentary about French cave paintings is on target for £550,000, possibly £600,000, at the UK box office.

That result has been achieved by Picturehouse Entertainment, the

distribution arm of the UK's leading arthouse cinema chain, following its earlier surprise success with *My Afternoons with Marguerite*. Hot on the heels of big wins for rival firm Curzon with films from its sister company Artificial Eye (for example, *Archipelago*), the strategic benefits for joint ownership in arthouse distribution and exhibition are becoming apparent.

Picturehouse programming boss Clare Binns explains that although the initial reaction from *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*'s producers was "Who are you?", the company was able to present a case that was "pretty compelling" and "something pretty unique" in terms of "the confidence about what we can deliver and how we can talk to our audiences".

While Picturehouse worked the "first 3D arthouse film" angle, and reached out to documentary fans and the academic community of

archaeologists and paleontologists, the company always knew that its prime asset was *Cave*'s director. A live Q+A with Herzog at Brixton's Ritzy cinema proved a midweek hot ticket, and a satellite simulcast at 48 screens nationwide added a nifty £46,000 in preview grosses. Despite often modest box office for his films, whether documentary or live action, the auteur has gradually acquired the status of international treasure: he recently guest-starred on *The Simpsons*, and his gloomy trademark narration has been spoofed in YouTube clips such as *Werner Herzog Reads Madeline* ("That night all the girls wake up screaming...").

Binns agrees: "There is a real and growing affection for him. He fell out of favour for a while, but he's really come back strong. I always felt he was a director who all the way through has been doing interesting things."

While there is an upside for

Recent Herzog films at UK box office

Film	Year	Gross
Bad Lieutenant	2010	£1,215,814
Cave Of Forgotten Dreams*	2011	£452,360
Rescue Dawn	2007	£278,321
Grizzly Man	2006	£220,383
Encounters at the End of the World	2009	£148,604
My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done	2010	£35,024
Invincible	2002	£13,572
Wild Blue Yonder	2007	£4,642

* Gross after 24 days

Picturehouse by retaining both the exhibitor and distributor's portions of revenue, the real win, says Binns, is ensuring a steady flow of product. "If you look at what else was going on in this period, *Cave* has really helped us, because we have a strong film, which, frankly, there otherwise wouldn't have been. We need to make sure we have good stuff coming through that we can market to our customers."

Death and the maiden

Mike Hodges investigates a dark tale of murder, corruption, kinky sex and game-playing in Elio Petri's 1970 film, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*

"How are you going to kill me this time?"
"Today I'm going to cut your throat."

And he does just that. But not before he's removed his immaculately tailored cream suit, carefully hanging the jacket on an antique clothes horse before ensuring the sharp creases in his trousers are preserved. Uniforms, including business suits, are important in Italy. Carabinieri, cardinals, Mafioso, priests, Il Papa, Mussolini, black shirts – the list of sartorial examples is endless. But the trouble with uniforms is that once they're taken off, as they inevitably are, their power immediately evaporates and the naked occupant is left looking as vulnerable as a newborn baby. And so it is with the assassin before he slips under the black sheet with the woman; pulling it over them both like it's a shroud. After some manoeuvring she suddenly rises up, groans as if sexually climaxing and slumps on top of him. Only when he slides from under her torso do we see any blood. Using the sheet to wipe it from his chest and neck, around which a gold cross and chain glint with each movement, he seems about to gag.

We are just four minutes into Elio Petri's *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, and throughout this scene of cold-blooded murder we've been treated to a wonderfully jaunty score by Ennio Morricone. He seems to know something we don't. We do know that the couple have been playing kinky sex games for some time, but now wonder if, with her throat cut, the game-playing is over. Or is it just beginning? Morricone lets us know it's the latter as the film takes an even stranger turn. The killer starts both to eradicate evidence of his presence in the room and create it simultaneously. "Precision, precision," he says later in the film.

Watching actors well versed in film craft working their movements and their use of props into an elegant and economical shape gives enormous pleasure. And Gian Maria Volonté is just brilliant when laying the trap in which he should rightly be caught. He leaves a strand of his sky-blue tie snagged in the victim's fingernail; he steps in her blood and leaves a trail of footsteps; he empties her jewellery box but leaves wads of money in full view for the cops to



The killing: Gian Maria Volonté plays a homicide chief who murders his lover

see. Finally he takes two bottles of champagne and leaves. He arrives with them in his car at Rome's police headquarters. The killer is also the homicide chief. What's more, he's just been promoted to lead the influential political squad. Hence the champagne. Morricone keeps underscoring the fact that the game is still in play – but now it's a different game.

Petri's film was made in 1970. It won the best foreign-language film award at the following year's Oscars, but has slipped from view since. Unfortunately I can't remember exactly when or where I saw it. All I remember is the indelible impression that one viewing made on me. Only when I finally traced and viewed it last week did it unlock a cascade of memories that may be pertinent to the different game Petri is examining after the murder.

Around the early 1970s, and for a decade or more afterwards, I had strong work connections with Italians, including Fellini in 1983. It started in 1971 when I was writing

Gian Maria Volonté is just brilliant when laying the trap in which he should be caught

Pulp, my second feature film, which was to be shot in Italy. We abandoned the idea – much to the dismay of our Italian production manager – because the use of each location necessitated negotiating with the Mafia. Gitt Magrini, the film's costume designer (*The Red Desert*, 1964; *The Wild Child*, 1969; *The Conformist*, 1970) and I became great friends. Passing through Rome some years later she invited me to a party. It turned out to be at the most elegant luxury residence I'd ever experienced. Celebrities wall to wall. There had recently been local elections resulting in a big swing to the Communist Party. Being at a loss for conversational topics I took it upon myself to ask everybody I met

how they had voted. All had voted communist. When pursued as to why, being so rich, they had voted so far to the left, they replied in astonishment: "In Italy communism is very different." But then everything is different in Italy. It really isn't surprising they invented opera.

In 1980 I was asked by Dino De Laurentiis, the Italian film mogul, to direct *Flash Gordon*, an unlikely choice. Once, during the madness of shooting, I asked him why he'd chosen me, expecting him to express some recognition of my talent. Instead he replied: "Because I liked your face." And he meant it. I was directing a multi-million-dollar film because he liked my face. But then Dino actually believed *Flash* would save the world and couldn't understand why the crew laughed uproariously at the daily rushes. I had to ask them to stop. And then there was the wondrous production designer Dino had brought on board. Although I adored Danilo Donati (Fellini's *Satyricon*, 1969; and *Casanova*, 1976), I swear he never read the script throughout the production, and he certainly built the huge sets purely for his own self-gratification. In one, Arboria, the trees were so huge I literally couldn't get the camera in. When I demurred, Dino asked: "Michael, how many movies you make?" "Three." "I make three hundred." And with that he smacked his hands like a pasta maker.

While Petri's film is undoubtedly about the corrosive power of power, a well-trodden path, maybe it's also about another game? Late in the film we discover that at their previous tryst Augusta Terzi (the exotic Florinda Bolkan) had called her lover "a baby". Worse, she had gone further, taunting him that he also made love like a baby. That jibe cost Augusta her life. Yet every action we witness of the police inspector supports her assertion; metaphorically he's never left his mother's tit and when he does he balls and screams, terrorises and bullies. What's more, all the men surrounding him seem to be in the same retarded state. So maybe Petri is also saying that life itself is just a childish game, a one-off performance in which nobody grows up. Possibly. After all, Petri, with his wonderful sense of irony, must recognise that filmmaking itself is a childish occupation; all make-believe and let's pretend.

Mike Hodges is best known as a filmmaker but has also written and directed for theatre and radio. He's also directed opera and recently completed a satirical novel, 'Watching the Wheels Come Off', which is available on Amazon

What the papers said



"It is easy to understand why this film caused such a furore in Italy, for its loathsome central character expresses aspects of Fascist ideology which look back to Mussolini as well as having relevance for our own time. Petri obviously wanted to make a

polemical film, but the sheer weight and relentlessness of his attack often mitigates against him. Although Gian Maria Volonté plays with his usual depth and intelligence, Petri often pushes him into ranting caricature, employing an excessive number of close-ups which tend to inflate the character rather than bring him into sharper focus." **John Gillett, 'Monthly Film Bulletin', May 1971**

Living in the city

Think of native New Yorkers and Woody Allen is sure to be at the top of the list. The director is now forever associated with the city in which so many of his films are set, none more evocatively than his 1979 classic *Manhattan*. The famous opening is a hymn to the city Allen so adored, his tribute to the silent 'city symphony' film. To Gershwin's music, shots of New York landmarks appear while Allen tries to encapsulate what the city means to him. "He adored New York City, he idolised it out of all proportion," he begins. Allen stars as Isaac Davis, a neurotic (what else)

TV writer who aspires to more serious work, and who is stuck in a May-September affair with a 17 year old (Mariel Hemingway), while negotiating relationships with characters played by Meryl Streep, Diane Keaton and Michael Murphy. It's a film of great lines and magical moments (Allen and Keaton's romantic walk through the Planetarium is perhaps the most poetic sequence he's shot), all caught in widescreen black and white by DoP Gordon Willis. As Allen says in his opening narration: "New York was his town, and it always would be."



NEW YORK STORIES Friday 24th – Sunday 26th June

'Manhattan' is showing on June 26th at 19.20, as part of MGM HD's New York Stories season – a weekend of films set in the Big Apple. Other featured movies include 'Desperately Seeking Susan', 'Flawless', 'New York New York', 'State of Grace', 'The Manchurian Candidate', 'The Basketball Diaries' and 'Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins'. For more details see www.mgmhd.co.uk.

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★★★★ "An achingly stylish paean to unrequited lust." *EMPIRE*

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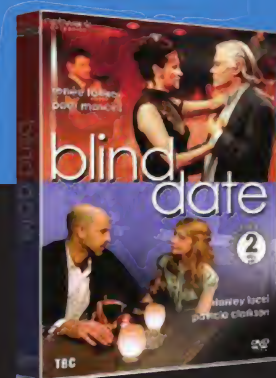


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Thinking inside the box

Flip back a few pages to the cover of this month's issue and count the directors' names in the taglines. If it's anything like the last three covers, just over a quarter of the words on it will be directors' first or second names. That's a whole lot of auteuring going on.

How you feel about directors as auteurs – and about the possessive credit ('A Joe Bloggs film') so fiercely fought against by the Screen Actors Guild – will depend on a number of factors, notably age, nationality and profession.

If you're really old and live in Hollywood, you'll have long since learned to live with the fact that the Oscar for best picture goes to the producer (and even, in days gone by, to the owner of the studio, as Hal Wallis discovered when, rising to his feet to acknowledge *Casablanca's* win in 1944, he found himself pipped to both stage and statuette by a podium-storming Jack Warner). Their bucks, their gong. Capitalism has a way of sorting these things out.

If you're over 50, you will have caught the tail-end of the struggle by a new breed of critics, with *Cahiers du Cinéma* to the fore, to establish the authorial credentials of generations of Hollywood directors who thought they were for hire but found they were creative artists after all.

If you live in France, where the intellectual property rights to a film do indeed reside with the director, this whole subject will strike you as futile, jejune and distressingly Anglo-Saxon. If, though, you are a screenwriter who has spent two years of your life on a dozen drafts, only to find the creative credit accorded entirely to the director, you may well be a little pissed off.

This is not the first time this issue has been raised in *Sight & Sound* and it will doubtless not be the last. But it was brought into focus for me by an event at the beginning of April at which I revisited the theme of a recent column – the one about *Bullitt* being an undervalued film and Peter Yates an underrated director ('Mr Busy', *S&S*, November) – in front of a live audience, including one notable screenwriter. And audiences, unlike the keyboard to which I am currently addressing myself, are in the habit of answering back.

Along the way, two things became clear. One, some bits of *Bullitt* really aren't very good. Not that that changes anything fundamental: you don't dismiss a Vermeer because he botched a milk jug in one corner. Yes, *Bullitt* has some clunky dialogue



For at least two centuries, European culture relied on the classical skills of crafting a work of art according to a scheme of well-established rules

scenes, most of them involving Jacqueline Bisset, but it's still a helluva movie. Two, *Bullitt* may not have been 'just' a Steve McQueen car-chase flick but it was, most definitely, a Steve McQueen film. He was the reason it was made, he approved the hiring of Yates, and he probably carried on doing for most of the movie exactly what he would have done regardless of whether Peter Yates or the Easter Bunny had been sitting in the director's chair.

This is not to detract from Yates's skill as a director, merely to recognise that he was functioning within a particular framework. I defy you to find me a film director who does not recognise the collaborative nature of his or her art. It is us critics who rely so exclusively on the sole-creative-person option, because it makes it so much easier to write about films.

Everybody these days is expected to 'think outside the box'. And I'm all for it: thinking outside the box is clearly a very valuable (not to mention a frequently rewarding) skill, enabling progress to be made in those spheres where barriers need to be broken down, envelopes pushed, paradigms replaced.

But it is to devalue another, less fashionable, less rewarding but equally important skill: that of thinking inside the box. For at least two centuries, European culture relied on the classical skills of crafting a work of art according to a scheme of well-established rules, as Bach or Racine or Watteau did. The interplay between the rules and the artist was a

major source of our artistic pleasure. Hollywood narrative conventions, for all that it was important for the French New Wave and any number of less coherent movements to break them, were likewise a well-defined box within which generations of filmmakers were content to work, honing their skills and driving a narrative machine as fine-tuned as any Formula 1 Ferrari.

What Peter Yates did in *Bullitt* was not create a film work out of nothing, nor look for where the box ended and being Peter Yates began, but to make the best of all possible Steve McQueen car-chase flicks. That he was left alone by the studio – the shoot took place in San Francisco; McQueen just wanted to drive the Mustang and was happy to let Yates get on with the other stuff – had something to do with it. But that was also how Yates – and a hundred other directors – worked: their aim was to make the best possible movie given (or in spite of) the available elements.

In the end, it is the laziness of the academic – unwilling to disentangle the various threads that go into the production of a film, uneasy with a critical vocabulary not based around the concept of an individual creator and happy to adopt the vocabulary of another age – that has led to the *politique des auteurs* being adopted as a default setting. It is an orthodoxy as rigid as any set by Rome: indeed, a more perfect example of thinking inside the box would be hard to find.

♦♦ Nick Roddick

● **London International Documentary Festival** hosts the UK premiere of Martin Scorsese's highly personal documentary about one of his cinematic heroes, 'Elia Kazan'. Other films screened include 'Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel'; Steven Soderbergh's 'And Everything is Going Fine', about the actor-writer Spalding Gray; and 'Senna' (pictured), about the Formula One driver. There is also a sidebar programme on films about the Arab world. Various venues in London, 13-28 May.

● **Mosaïques Film Festival**, the annual festival of world cinema, again displays its geographical reach with films including 'Circo' from Mexico, the German-Kenyan co-production 'Soul Boy' from Nigeria, 'Abyssinie Swing' about the golden age of Ethiopian music, 'Donoma' from Haitian-born director Djinn Carrenard, and the acclaimed 'A Separation' from Iranian director Asghar Farhadi. Institut Francais, London, 2-9 June.

● **Sheffield International Documentary Festival** has moved from its usual November slot and this year opens with Morgan Spurlock's 'POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold', about product placement in the movies. The full programme is announced later in May. Sheffield, 8-12 June.

● **Terracotta Film Festival** shows a selection of 14 recent films from the Far East, including 'The Lost Bladesman', starring Donnie Yen and 'Child's Eye', by the Pang brothers. Prince Charles Cinema, London, 5-8 May.

● **More diversity is needed in British cinema**, was the finding of an independent study of UK audiences undertaken on behalf of the outgoing UK Film Council. Some 4,315 people were surveyed on portrayals of different groups on screen, and the results show work is still to be done to properly reflect British society on screen. Older women, ethnic minorities, Eastern European immigrants, and lesbian, gay and bisexual audiences all felt they were misrepresented in British films or shown in damagingly negative ways. The full report is at www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk



Different strokes

*Jerzy Skolimowski's **Deep End** explores the obsessive nature of adolescent desire. But can it still feel as dangerous as it did in 1970, asks David Thomson*

I never realised that the organised world of cinema thought it had lost *Deep End* – you have to be grateful for small mercies, because I'd have been even more upset if I'd heard that rumour when it was current. After all, if a thing as substantial but phantom as a film is lost it's not the same as searching for an engagement ring diamond in a pile of dirty snow. Not that I believe her scummy boyfriend ever gave Susan (Jane Asher) a real diamond. Chances are it was fake, bought for five quid at a dayglo hut on Tottenham Court Road. But it's the thought that counts, I suppose – so long as the thought doesn't kill you.

Now the film is back, restored and more or less safe. But can it be as dangerous as it felt in 1970?

Suppose they had lost *Deep End*, would any kid today credit that the film had existed just from hearing its description. How does one tell this unlikely story? You see, when Susan cuffs Mike (John Moulder-Brown), because he's let the air out of the tyres she was planning to drive on, the blow knocks the stone from the setting of her engagement ring. And it falls somewhere in the snow. So it's demented, yet it makes insane sense, that the two of them collect every bit of likely snow in plastic bags and take it back to the closed public baths where they work, form a camp in the drained pool, and use a long extension cord and an electric kettle to melt the snow in an attempt to

isolate the 'diamond'. That's daft, isn't it? But it's what children might do. Susan knows she needs to retrieve her diamond to stop that sour fiancé turning livid, while Mike is stupid with desire for Susan. That's the real issue: it's a film about a kid going mad with hope – and I wonder whether that happens any more?

So the film is called *Deep End* because much of it is set at a suburban swimming bath (they used a place in Leytonstone, all echoes and jaded tile, chlorine and semen, though a lot of the film was shot in Bavaria). But the true 'deep end' – as in going off the – is a 'not-a-snowball's-chance-in-hell' crush. Mike is supposed to be 15 or so, just out of school but still a boy. He has no qualifications except an 'O' level in Longing. He's a virgin, you know it, and you're as sure that Susan isn't, although she can't be more than a few years older. He's like someone you'd meet in a Wedekind play and she's from Peckham or Camberwell – dead attractive for maybe six more months, but cold, snarky and wearing stupid white boots because she saw them on *Ready Steady Go!*, and a dress cut up to her bum. He rips up her stuffed toy because she calls his Mum a "cow". She's mean because she assumes she's superior, but Asher has the eye-shadow of experience, so there's nothing Mike can do except fall disastrously in love with her curt grace. And (spoiler coming) he is so far gone off that deep end he's likely to have to off her, especially if he can't make love to her. No, I don't mean murder, exactly, but – face it – it's love or death for this boy, which Susan would never have understood if she'd lived to be 100.

I am talking about Jerzy Skolimowski's 1970 film *Deep End*, which he wrote with Jerzy Gruz and

Boleslaw Sulik, and for which Asher got a Bafta nomination as supporting actress – she lost to Margaret Leighton in *The Go Between* (can you credit they shared an era, let alone the same year?). I realise that in a serious film magazine such as this – especially one that ran an excellent survey of Skolimowski (by David Thompson) in the April issue – the sensible and responsible thing to do is to relate this to the director's oeuvre in a ... useful way? So I could propose that *Deep End* shows a rare and astringent blend of realism and surrealism, just as it has the sleight of hand able to shuffle Leytonstone and Munich. (That feels better, doesn't it?) I could go on at some length about it being a movie of diverse fluids – red paint, milkshake, swimming pool water, snow, blood and bodily fluids too. I could even add, politely, that since you never really know what Skolimowski is going to do next it's actually hard to locate his oeuvre.

What it comes down to is that I love this film so much I'm still shaken by the thought that it might have been lost – and even by the possibility that if young people today aren't going to go wild for it then it might as well have stayed lost. Now, you shouldn't admit such things in a serious film magazine, should you? Though I'm bound to wonder, would more 'lost' films be good for us all? The discreet charm of films you can't see is not to be overlooked.

If it was a lost film, I would remember the way Mike finds a life-size cardboard poster of a nearly-nude girl in Soho, steals it, and then goes swimming with it in the pool. There's no proof that the girl in the cardboard cut-out is Susan or Jane Asher (except that it's positively the same dame at the mundane level of photography); she is his Eve. And the film offers no explanation for this because it doesn't need to – you can take it one of two ways: Susan is a sly fox who gets around, and/or Mike sees her everywhere. She is the incarnation of desire. He is so smitten with her he can't recognise her as a caustic tart who's no good to him. As if we ever seek what's best for us. That's why it is his poetic ambition if he finds the diamond – I say *if* – to lie naked on the floor of the dry pool with the stone resting on his tongue so that she is going to have to come and get it, and come and get it.

I know the credits say Skolimowski made the film – and I would accept this even if he wasn't there on the Tube in one scene reading a Polish newspaper – but would you really be inclined to



argue if the credits said Jean Vigo or Luis Buñuel or Michael Powell had done it? Powell would have been thrilled by Asher's tawny hair – it might have brought him out of exile – and you could easily rhapsodise over the hue of her hair and its affinity with blood, especially if you were not clinging to the tatters of critical or scholarly dignity. (As a matter of fact, in America, where Paramount released it, there was that rare thing, a poster worthy of the film, where Jane Asher's hair broke into a cascade of blood.)

You may judge from what I'm saying that *Deep End* is a small story, with no 'reach' or redeeming moral purpose – it has not a glimmering of larger social significance – except the enormity of the way desire will likely kill you or the object of your desire. The thing that seems unquestionably 'lost' in *Deep End* is its romantic certainty that movies should be about love and yearning. It is an honourably adolescent film, yet this adult Pole – who is a mysterious and rather enclosed man – was able to re-imagine that raw mood as if it was happening to him. It's a film about an inescapable, glorious doom – and we don't really do that anymore, do we?



Fatal attraction: John Moulder-Brown as Mike and Jane Asher as Susan in 'Deep End'



I know the credits say Skolimowski made the film but would you argue if they said Vigo, Buñuel or Powell made it?

Those big, obliterating endings have lost their lustre. So *Deep End* harks back to a culture in which young people often went to the movies to rehearse growing up. Whereas, these days, some of them seem crabby and retirable at four.

You're quite right. I shouldn't say that. It's unfair to 'youth', let alone kiddies – but hasn't cool erased naivete? I apologise for not writing a conventional essay about *Deep End* – but I hope you can feel how seriously I take the film and what it represents as an attempt by the movies to bring our dreams to life. The ending – and I'm not going to spell it out, I'm going to leave you as much as possible – seems so beautiful, so disastrous, so surprising but so inevitable, so violent yet so serene, that you realise how the arbitrariness that hangs over *Deep End* (it feels nearly improvised sometimes) is as etched as a steel engraving. Acid should be the final fluid. Skolimowski knew exactly what he was doing with this film – which leaves you

wondering how he appeared not to know at some other times.

If you have any doubts about *Deep End*, I'm not the one to answer them. Haven't we always known it's possible for a film to stay 'lost' or unnoticed when everyone is apparently looking at it? But if you have any reason to give yourself an adventure, just play it in a double bill with *L'Atalante*. The one is black and white, the other is colour, but both films are about the same underwater attempt to attain desire, and both come from an age in which we were accustomed to see creatures swimming in the screen's liquid as if we were at an aquarium.

■ The restored version of 'Deep End' is released in selected cinemas nationwide on 6 May. A special preview screening featuring a Q&A with Jane Asher and John Moulder-Brown will be held at BFI Southbank on 4 May. The BFI's dual format Blu-ray and DVD comes out on 18 July

Monthly Film Bulletin's original 1971 review

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a major plot twist

Skolimowski's assertion that he never thinks of symbols or interpretations when he makes a film is a useful caution to anyone tempted to see the municipal baths in 'Deep End' as a microcosm of the sexual world; the bureaucratic segregation of the sexes, the exhibitionism of the pool contrasted with the fantasising of the cubicles. The logic of Skolimowski's films is poetic, creating overtones not through an organised equation of image and meaning but through surrealist metaphors which erupt to spark actuality into life. Skolimowski allows his characters' dreams total freedom, and within that subjective arena anything can happen. Previous Skolimowski heroes have been galvanised into virtual lunacy by the strength of their ruling passions – boxing, cars, military heroics – and Mike in 'Deep End' is the latest in that line, an adolescent ex-schoolboy gradually transformed from victim to pursuer in a world of sexual opportunism, but remaining throughout curiously innocent.

The baths serve essentially as a breeding ground for such dreams – "When they're in there, they're all supermen," says Jane Asher washing the boasting graffiti off the cubicle walls; and Diana Dors' orgasmic football soliloquy, clasp Mike to her bosom as she dreams of George Best ("It's always tackle, dribble, dribble, SHOOT!") is an object lesson in the subordination of reality to ruling passion. Mike's exaggerated fascination with sex is nourished by its ever-present commercial exploitation – the sex film he sees while spying on Susan, and the advertising cut-out of a stripper resembling Susan which he steals and on which he later floats in naked adoration back at the pool.

Though its structure is piecemeal, 'Deep End' has some striking recurring images. The film's sporadic underwater shots accompany Mike's descent into fantasy – visions of a naked Susan, progressing from the cut-out to the closing shot of Mike's necrophiliac embrace, blood issuing from the dead girl's neck. The film begins and ends with red liquid spilling across the frame, an image possibly of the spread of irrational passion that the film portrays – and making sense, as a visual harmony, of the hand that mysteriously paints a section of the corridor wall red in the background of a cantankerous scene between Susan and the cashier, or of the pots of red paint that overturn spectacularly during Mike and Susan's quarrel. Jane Asher's red hair, and the isolated shot of her framed against an orange and red section of wall in the baths, thus identify her as the film's temptress.

On a broader level, 'Deep End' sets up innumerable correspondences with the implications of its title – deep end and shallow end; Mike's progress from callow schoolboy to virtual sex murderer; the visual contrast between the shabby, lifeless streets of London by day (actually Munich) and the corrupt glitter of the nightclubs. Mike's determination to fathom those depths leads finally to such a lunatic single-mindedness that even Susan's death evokes no emotion stronger than gratitude at this last gift of physical submission. The scene's extraordinary mixture of poetry and black farce is the logical culmination to a film that has alternated both moods with prodigious rapidity, creating a study in the growth of obsession that is both funny and frighteningly exact. ♦ Nigel Andrews



*Unloved, unlauded but no longer alone: the 75 mainstream movies from the past 30 years selected below were either commercially or critically buried. Rescued here by the affection of our regular contributors, now they can shine again, says **Ryan Gilbey***



IMAGE MANIPULATION BY ETIENNE GUILLET



FIGHT CLUB: Peter Falk in 'All the Marbles'

The Criterion Collection, purveyor of special edition DVDs and Blu-rays, last month offered a sneak preview of a forthcoming title to be afforded its bells-and-whistles, no-outtake-left-unseen treatment. Unexpectedly, this turned out to be a scarcely remembered 1984 horror cheapie called *C.H.U.D.* (that's "Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dweller" to all you vegetarian overground types). What the film's admirers could not have foreseen was that their passion would be shared by such esteemed fans: Criterion seemed to have commissioned a commentary track by the Portuguese auteur and closet *C.H.U.D.* buff Pedro Costa, as well as essays by noted critics J. Hoberman and Dennis Lim. It sounded too good to be true.

It was. Genuinely amusing April Fools' Day jokes are as uncommon as instances of humility from the Weinstein brothers. Nevertheless, Criterion had managed a corker in its detailed, self-deprecating spoof ("Optional soundtrack dubbed in the guttural language of C.H.U.D...."). At the heart of it all was a fantasy that any cinephile will have entertained: that those films for which we harbour an enduring passion, but which have not been insulated against obscurity by widespread approbation or commercial success, might yet enjoy their day in the sun.

We're not talking here about the pastoral Kazakh drama that took all the prizes at a far-flung festival held at high altitude. Nor are we concerned with the guilty pleasure or the arthouse endeavour that didn't get its due (the *L'Humanité*, the *Pola X*). More exotic and endangered than any of these species is the movie that went on release, backed in many cases by the studio dollar, and even enjoyed an outing at the multiplex, only to fade undeservedly from view thereafter. It may have been a hit (like *The Devil Wears Prada* or *Footloose* from our list below), or it might have become a critical punchbag (*Hudson Hawk*, *The Godfather Part III*). In some cases it is a commercially appealing entity that never quite connected with the public (*The Sure Thing*, *The Runaways*). And at least one of the films named has been disowned by its own director (*Static*). For whatever reason, these titles are now discarded or rarely mentioned. They have checked in for an indefinite stay at the Overlooked Hotel.

There are typically two routes to movie longevity. One is financial success and permeation of popular culture beyond the reaches of the multiplex or the movie magazines. The other is via the safety net of auteurism, which ensures a future playing at a retrospective somewhere in the world, and maybe as a contender for a new print, a BFI monograph or a 'making of' documentary. It will never have to fend for itself.

Meanwhile, the only hope for the movie that benefits from neither of these lies in the sort of critical reappraisal that *S&S* is now proposing with its survey of those films that have fallen from view over the past three decades. This 30-year timeline restricts the quantity of nominations, which might otherwise verge on the infinite, but also coincides approximately with the arrival of the first UK multiplex in 1985, back when a multiplicity of screens demanded a high turnover of product. (Whereas now a *Harry*

Potter or a *Pirates of the Caribbean* will hog six or seven screens for months at a time, severely restricting the chances that any latter-day undiscovered commercial treasures will make it as far as the multiplex.)

By starting the survey in 1981, the emphasis is placed on recent commercial cinema – movies that may not yet fall within that protective enclosure of coolness in which work from the 1970s and earlier can commonly be found. Much easier to pound the drum for Russ Meyer and Roger Corman, or for the modern counterpart of the now defunct B movie, than to seek out the unhip 1980s or 90s equivalents.

There is an obvious precedent to this project. If our back issues of *Cahiers du Cinéma* have taught us anything, it must be that a democracy of taste lies at the heart of film appreciation – art will always find its way into the marketplace. Look at Jerry Lewis, raised shoulder-high by *Cahiers* and proclaimed a god. Or Sam Fuller, whose critical standing can be traced back to the *Cahiers* critic and filmmaker Luc Moullet, who wrote in 1956 that "Fuller is to Welles as Marlowe is to Shakespeare". (Thirteen years later, the Edinburgh Film Festival mounted a full Fuller retrospective.)

In the act of rescuing the movies that culture forgot, the cinephile is also challenging the canon, or rather presenting an idiosyncratic one of his or her own. Many daydreams have been devoted to musing on the great films that never were (Kubrick's *Napoleon*, say, or Malick's *Q*), but it is equally valid to consider a parallel universe where the praise or prestige were doled out to different works – precisely what made the Criterion gag so bitingly authentic. When the *Cahiers* writers and their fellow aficionados and enthusiasts crammed into Henri Langlois's Cinémathèque, the prevailing ideal was not to admire any orthodoxy ratified in advance. "Films would be flung into the programme without any thought," recalled Gilbert Adair in 2001, "but that was the theory – that all films deserved to be seen and your judgements should not be shaped for you in advance by hierarchies imposed on the programme."

That openness persists in the heart of anyone who goes to the cinema prepared to be ambushed. And it underpins the notion that any film can be saved from falling through the cracks of history if somebody loves it. Think of the following titles as a distant relative to the architectural sites of *Restoration*, the BBC programme that invites viewers to vote for the listed buildings they want to save. There's no vote here though, only an exhortation to cast off the deterrent of negative reviews or the stink of box-office failure and to see these pictures afresh. The full-stop imposed on a film's life by critics or the public can always be transformed into a semi-colon or an ellipsis if the advocacy is passionate and persuasive enough.

These discarded titles have checked in for an indefinite stay at the Overlooked Hotel

A.I. Artificial Intelligence

Steven Spielberg (US, 2001)

By Jonathan Rosenbaum, critic, US

I'm not alone in considering *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* a very great and deeply misunderstood film. Others as disparate as Andrew Sarris and the late Stan Brakhage have more or less agreed with me, as well as my friend and favourite academic critic, James Naremore. But it's also clear to me that any ordinary auteurist way of processing cinema can't begin to handle this masterwork adequately. Reading it simply as a Spielberg film, as most detractors do, or even trying to read it simply as a Kubrick film, is a futile exercise with limited rewards, even though the fingerprints of both directors are all over it. (I tend to see it as I believe Kubrick sometimes envisioned it – as a film of his, informed by Spielberg's sensibility.) Seeing *A.I.* as a perpetually unresolved dialectic between these filmmakers yields a complicated logic, an ambiguity where the bleakest pessimism and the most ecstatic feelgood enchantment swiftly alternate and even occasionally merge – viewed this way, it becomes a far more enriching experience, however troubling and unresolved. As a profound meditation on the difference between human and mechanical, it also constitutes one of the best allegories about cinema.

Alien 3

David Fincher (US, 1992)

By Jason Wood, programmer, UK

The most reviled entry in the *Alien* series and a relative box-office failure, *Alien 3* was Fincher's feature debut. Concocted by a small army of writers, Walter Hill and Vincent Ward among them, the film is oppressive enough to feel like Kafka in space. Sigourney Weaver returns as Ellen Ripley and finds herself on a desolate penal colony populated by rapists. If Ripley's gender were not enough to cause disharmony, her parasitic stowaway really puts the fiend among the felons. Since the film was shot in the UK, this dissolute bunch are portrayed by such British stalwarts as Pete Postlethwaite, Paul McGann and Ralph Brown. None of this sounds promising, but Fincher's film has much in common with Ridley Scott's original: the build-up is slow, accruing tension by increments, and there's a palpable sense of dread. Not until some way in does a prisoner yell, "It's starting" as the special effects are wheeled out and the film spins off the rails. But until then it is gloom all the way and all the better for it.

All the Marbles

Robert Aldrich (US, 1981)

By Nicolas Rapold, critic, US

This story of a female wrestling duo and their hustling trainer (Peter Falk!) is forgotten even by Aldrich fans, who tend to tune out after *Hustle* (1975), but as the trio tool around the grapplers' circuit in a Detroit clunker – set against fading Rust Belt landscapes – their grit and hope come through. Performers playing

Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

at a seemingly fake sport but with very real stakes of bruises and cash, the 'Dolls' (Vicki Frederick and Laurene Landon) cling to their showbiz dignity even while covered in mud. Aldrich's nose for the pleasures of violence (specifically, catfights) remains keen in the terrifically entertaining bouts, some starring professional wrestlers. Aldrich died two years later, but nailing the climactic fight in front of a sing-along audience at the MGM Grand, he went out with a bang.

The Arrival

David N. Twohy (US, 1996)

By Nick Bradshaw, 'Sight & Sound'

This back-of-the-truck paranoia sci-fi B movie – in which Charlie Sheen's rogue ex-NASA scientist discovers hot-planet-loving aliens in human guise ramping up CO₂ production from covert jungle power stations across Latin America – is not only the most entertaining screen treatment of global warming I've seen, but the most compelling allegory for the perverse bind in which our climate change politics are now stuck. A sequel today would have to feature an alien takeover of the US Republican party – which brings to mind *The Arrival's* spiritual antecedent and the original biomorphic takeover fable, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955). Like Don Siegel's cult classic (and unlike Roland Emmerich's impatient planet-buster *The Day After Tomorrow*, 2004), *The Arrival* puts its hysteria on slow burn: it has its showy special effects, but its most severe implications are delivered in some wonderfully reticent dialogue by a smooth Ron Silver. I can't say the film has *Body Snatchers's* pulp poetry, but it does feature attempted murder by bathtub and a goateed Sheen at the nadir of his popularity taking every opportunity to expose a pumped and oiled torso.

Avalon

Oshii Mamoru (Japan, 2000)

By Jasper Sharp, critic, UK

Overshadowed by Oshii's anime pair *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Innocence* (2004), this Tarkovsky-inspired foray into live action possesses a similar pessimistic regard for technology. Filmed in Poland, with Polish actors performing in their own language, the film depicts a group of virtual-war-game addicts and their quest for their in-game Holy Grail. Oshii's idiosyncratic use of CGI follows a different tack from other titles of its ilk, its dystopian 'reality' scenes digitally leached of colour, which only returns to the frame to varying degrees the further its characters are from the coldly inhuman technology of Avalon's false paradise. The rendition of the immersive game world is stunning: tanks roll across open plains as the players hide out in ruined buildings, assailed by helicopters and heavy-duty artillery fire; when hit, bodies flatten into two-dimensional projections before shattering into a myriad of triangular shards. In the end, our protagonist's elevation into the final 'Class Real' phase of the game, accompanied by Kawai Kenji's characteristically majestic operatic score, really does take the film to another level entirely.

Boogie Boy

Craig Hamann (US, 1997)

By Michael Brooke, critic, UK

Ex-con Jesse (Mark Dacascos) tries to make it as a rock drummer while under constant threat of being sucked back into a life of drug-fuelled crime. It's hardly an original premise, and writer-director Hamann's previous claim to fame as one of Quentin Tarantino's buddies back in his Video Archives period (mutual friend Roger Avary is executive producer here) didn't set pulses racing in anticipation. But the director turned out to have a real feel for scuzzy



The Butterfly Effect

J. Mackye Gruber, Eric Bress (US 2003)

By Mark Fisher, critic, UK

"Change one thing, change everything," goes the tagline from *The Butterfly Effect*. The well-known concept derived from chaos theory maintains that small causes can produce massive effects – the famous example being the flutter of a butterfly's wings in one part of the world causing a storm somewhere else. But while *The Butterfly Effect* retains the idea that small changes can result in unpredictable consequences, the film – made all the more disturbing because it stars Ashton Kutcher, familiar from such froth as *That '70s Show* and *Dude, Where's My Car?* – has a more bleakly pessimistic message: you can't change anything important; misery is inevitable; all you can change is who suffers and what afflicts them, and even that won't be the result of deliberation. Kutcher plays the multiply traumatised Evan Treborn, who discovers that he has the ability to go back into crucial moments of his past and alter them, as if he is the digital editor of his own life. But he finds that averting one trauma always produces another in its place.

In the end, *The Butterfly Effect* owes more to theologian Alvin Plantinga's concept of 'transworld depravity' – the idea that evil and suffering are inevitable in any conceivable world in which human beings have free will – than to the open-ended ecosystems of chaos theory. Plantinga developed the idea because he wanted to prove that God and suffering were compatible, but *The Butterfly Effect* gives us the transworld depravity without any possibility of redemption. Here, it is as if the fatalism that simmers not far beneath consumer culture's obligatory optimism suddenly comes to the fore. And, in the mid-2000s, the film's notion that sometimes catastrophe is not amenable to intervention could not help but play as – a perhaps appropriately unintentional – comment on misadventures in Iraq.

low-life dialogue, fleshed out here by a surprisingly upmarket cast that includes Frederic Forrest and Emily Lloyd as the weirdest motel habitués since Norman Bates. There's a barnstorming turn from *Unforgiven's* Jaimz Woolvett as Jesse's heroin-addicted former cellmate, and cameos by the super-culty likes of Joan Jett, Traci Lords and Linnea Quigley. As the troubled Jesse himself, Mark Dacascos reveals a wider thespian range than his martial-arts past might have indicated, though a bone is tossed to his fanbase in the form of a furious fight at the climax. Despite this promising start, Hamann's filmography has since run dry.

Bound

Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski (US, 1996)

By Hannah McGill, critic, UK

Amid the many dark-witted, bloody capers that surfaced in the 1990s, the Wachowski brothers' pre-*The Matrix* mob thriller stands out for its simplicity, discipline and style. At once contained (it barely leaves one apartment) and baroque (crazed camera angles, a vividly dramatic score), it balances brilliantly excess and control. Then there's the innovation that almost prevented it from getting made and that remains startlingly unusual today: a central couple who happen to be gay and whose gayness neither defines nor destroys them. (Persuading two mainstream actresses to take the roles was a challenge for the directors, yet Jennifer Tilly and Gina Gershon have never been better or better cast.) *Bound* is far from innocent of the ironic, referential sensibility so prevalent at the time of its making: the gruff mobsters, Tilly's hyper-feminine moll and Gershon's swaggering tomboy all come from the big box of movie archetypes, and the film's moral blackness and relentless pacing pay tribute to Hitchcock. Still, *Bound* feels fresh and sincere, rather than film-school smug, its confidence prefiguring the familiar/original shot in the arm that was *The Matrix*. Its very straightforwardness is rewarding, coming as it does within a genre that so often births tangled plots and silly twists; its performances and presentation never falter.

The Bounty

Roger Donaldson (UK/US, 1984)

By Patrick Fahy, BFI

In the late 1970s, David Lean and Robert Bolt toiled on scripts for a two-film epic about the *Bounty* mutiny, which (as per Richard Hough's source book) blamed Fletcher Christian for troublemaking while casting Captain Bligh as hero. Though budgets sank that project, Bolt later rewrote the first script for this, Donaldson's first Hollywood film, charting the *Bounty's* voyage as flashbacks from Bligh's court martial – thus the film itself puts Bligh on trial (and restores his honour). Mel Gibson proves suitably English and turbulent as Christian, but Anthony Hopkins is magnificent as Bligh, every inch Bolt's description, "the soul of a hawk in the body of a pigeon". His navigating from memory across 4,000 miles of ocean provides a stirring climax. Vangelis's score has dated, but the film has Lean's fingerprints all over it: beautiful locations, a raft of fine actors (Day-Lewis, Neeson, Olivier etc), Bolt's signature law-versus-nature theme and a realistic maritime feel, captured by cameraman Arthur Ibbetson (twice Lean's focus puller, and hired here at Stanley Kubrick's recommendation when the original DP jumped ship days before shooting).

The Box

Richard Kelly (US, 2009)

By Mark Fisher, critic, UK

The Box is based on Richard Matheson's 1970 short story, 'Button, Button', later adapted into an episode of the revived *The Twilight Zone* in 1986. A well-dressed stranger, Mr Steward (a magisterially disquieting Frank Langella), arrives at a family's home carrying a box with a button on top of it. If they press the button, Steward informs them, they will receive a million dollars; however, someone that they don't know will die. This metaphysical-moral dilemma becomes the basis of a film that occupies the space between true horror and science fiction and the realm of the weird. Kelly uses elements from both Matheson's story and the *The Twilight Zone*, adding references to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Sartre's existentialism, conspiracy theories and his own childhood experiences. Sometimes this synthesis can seem unwieldy, but ultimately *The Box*

has the (in)consistency of a dream and the quality of an infernal labyrinth. In part, *The Box* is disturbing because the nightmare geography it opens up – in which actions in one part of the world result in suffering and death elsewhere – is disconcertingly in tune with the geopolitical predicament that globalised capitalism and eco-catastrophe impose on us.

Breakdown

Jonathan Mostow (US, 1997)

By Tim Robey, 'The Daily Telegraph', UK

Jonathan Mostow has done mid-level studio blockbusters (*U-571*, *Surrogates*) and one perfectly solid franchise instalment (*Terminator 3*), but he's never improved on *Breakdown*, a resiliently simple idea pushed into ever sweatier places. It begins with a road trip, an apparent breakdown and a lift from a stranger (J.T. Walsh, at his matter-of-fact best). The reveal is an organised kidnapping ring, which demands far more money than Kurt Russell is able to cough up for his captured wife (Kathleen Quinlan). Mostow's tight hold on the script's thumbscrew logic is matched by his skill with the cast: Russell is so good at registering the steps from smug, flustered city rat turning heads in a diner to bewildered terror that you wonder why more Hitchcockian everymen haven't come his way. There's a dash of *Duel* (1971), a hint of *The Hitcher* (1986) and, like John Dahl's *Joy Ride* (2001), it's a redneck roadkill suspenser that knows exactly how to use the rear-view mirror.

Une chambre en ville

Jacques Demy (France, 1982)

By Geoff Andrew, head of film programme, BFI Southbank

Maybe it was because the score was by Michel Colombier rather than Demy regular Michel Legrand; maybe it was because Deneuve's insistence on singing the lead role herself led the director to cast Dominique Sanda (who agreed to be dubbed); maybe it was because of the background – a violent 1950s dockers' strike – to the tale of a doomed adulterous *amour fou*. Whatever the reason, this dark, deliriously intense *liebestod* never attained the success of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964), and has therefore barely travelled beyond France. More's the pity, since as with the earlier film, once one accepts the formal artifice of an all-sung narrative, the mix of poignant music, a rich libretto, exquisite expressionist design and vivid characterisation steadily builds to a denouement of truly operatic power. Though Sanda and Richard Berry are excellent as the ill-starr'd lovers, they are perhaps upstaged by Danielle Darrieux as the former's rueful mother and by Michel Piccoli – bilious green suit and red beard evoking psychotic jealousy – as her impotent cuckold husband. A mid-song throat-slitting is merely the most shocking moment in a virtually unknown masterpiece.

Contact

Robert Zemeckis (US, 1997)

By Jonathan Romney, 'The Independent on Sunday', UK

At the time of *Contact*, Robert Zemeckis said what really excited him about CGI was that it allowed him to change the colour of a sky. Before his increasingly ugly experiments with motion capture (*Polar Express* etc), Zemeckis was exploring the more delicate possibilities of the new special-effects palette. This drama about the search for extra-terrestrial life ostensibly promises a cosmic blockbuster but proves rather more adult and introspective. Certainly, there's a New Age/therapeutic streak to this inner-space odyssey, in which Jodie Foster's scientist ventures into the Great Beyond, only to find... herself. But Zemeckis's elegant visual imagination makes her voyage remarkably affecting, even when Foster's Ellie arrives at her

destination, which resembles a hippy-era velvet painting. The film has an inspired opening sequence: as we pull back further and further from earth, generations of radio broadcasts hover around the planet. Another image that has stayed with me is a close-up of Foster's face in transit, its contours uncannily shifting and warping as she hurtles into the unknown (like the missing reverse-angle shot of 2001's stargate sequence). Few have followed, but *Contact* suggested a path for CGI genre cinema that was subtly expressionistic, even anti-spectacular.

Contact High

Michael Glawogger (Austria, 2009)

By the Ferroni Brigade, Austria and Germany

This wondrous comedy cocktail combines inspirations from such divergent sources as stoner psychedelia, Louis de Funès farces and literary influences from Lewis Carroll to Vonnegut to create a hallucinatory hippy-Buddhist mandala. It's one of Glawogger's richest and most personal films, but it's conceived as the kind of universal popular entertainment that doesn't care for target-audience tailoring and thus doesn't fit the marketplace. Hence *Contact High* failed to make contact with a large audience in Austria and remains unseen almost everywhere else – and ironically now waits to be resurrected as one of the magical maudit masterpieces of the past decade.

The Craft

Andrew Fleming (US, 1996)

By Sophie Mayer, academic and critic, UK

The far edge of grunge and the pinnacle of *The X-Files* marked out 1996. Dark magic as a metaphor for teenage disaffection was in fashion: the next year would see the emergence of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Harry Potter, a series of books in no way reminiscent of Jill Murphy's *The Worst Witch*, made into a television movie starring Fairuza Balk in 1986. In *The Craft* Balk plays the worst witch again, but here gig-

gling potions and Grand Wizard crushes are replaced by homoerotic rituals and the crushing of romantic rivals to death. Sarah (Robin Tunney) inherits supernatural powers from her mother; her arrival in town prompts Nancy (Balk), the dark rebel, to call together a coven of disaffected girls. Empowerment is fun at first, punishing jocks and creating beauty to a perfect mid-90s soundtrack of *Elastica*, *Juliana Hatfield* and *Portishead*, plus *Siouxsie and The Smiths*. Dumb and jumpy enough for a Halloween drinking game, *The Craft* is – until its disappointingly hysterical conclusion – a smart satire on adolescent fears.

Deep Cover

Bill Duke (US, 1992)

By James Bell, 'Sight & Sound'

Bill Duke's bleak thriller has had its champions, but still hasn't the reputation it deserves and it's far too often lumped in with more routine exploitation movies. Here the drug barons aren't charismatic Scar-faces we secretly root for, they're ugly and nasty – the repellent Felix Barbosa was never going to inspire a gangsta rap tune as Tony Montana did. It's a film with a genuinely dangerous edge, in which violence is used to tighten the narrative tension, not to offer show-stopping release. But neither does *Deep Cover* deploy a contrived 'grittiness'. It sits in its own distinct place, fascinating in the tension it forges in the marriage of Michael Tolkin and Henry Bean's superb script – rooted in realism and issues of race, political hypocrisies and personal motivations – and the film's stylised, visual artifice, poetic narration and brilliantly used hip-hop score. That tension also sparks between Laurence Fishburne and Jeff Goldblum; neither has ever been better, Fishburne coiled with incredible intensity as the conflicted undercover cop, and Goldblum, as the increasingly corrupted attorney, giving the film unpredictable, eccentric dimensions. You can return again and again to *Deep Cover* and find new notes. It's one of the most distinctive thrillers of the 1990s.



'Bound' still feels fresh and sincere, rather than film-school smug, its confidence prefiguring the shot in the arm that was 'The Matrix'

Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

De l'autre côté du lit

Pascale Pouzadoux (France, 2008)

By Ginette Vincendeau, academic and critic, UK

Despite recent assertions in the British press that "France is a romcom-free zone" there has been a remarkable rise in French romantic comedies in the last ten to 15 years. The phenomenon is clearly related to the popularity of the Hollywood genre, but equally its French credentials go back to the New Wave, and more recently *Amélie* (2001). It is also connected to an equally remarkable rise in women directors. This combination of popular genre, American aura and feminine focus means that – *quelle surprise!* – such films are non grata for auteur critics. Yet if the 100 or so films in the category are uneven, there is much to treasure. *De l'autre côté du lit* is one of my favourites. A youngish couple with two children going through a bad patch decide to swap roles – Monsieur will stay home and look after the children, Madame will take his manager's post in the office. He guffaws that at last he'll have a rest, but ends up exhausted while she blossoms. It's funny, stylish, has two of France's top stars (Sophie Marceau and Dany Boon) and makes a feminist point – which is more than one can say of many French films of higher repute.

The Devil Wears Prada

David Frankel (US, 2006)

By Nick James, *Sight & Sound*

I was the lone male at a screening clearly set up for alumni of women's magazines when I first saw *The Devil Wears Prada*. Despite feeling about as welcome as a hairball in a freshly painted room, I had a good time, without feeling I needed to engage too heavily (I didn't have to write about it). Only now have I noticed, for instance, that David Frankel directed television series like *Entourage*, *Sex in the City* and *Band of Brothers*. Yet the film, adapted brilliantly for the screen by Aline Brosh McKenna from Lauren Weisberger's novel, stayed with me. Initially, I parked it as a good genre piece that comes pretty close to a classical Hollywood comedy of the Lubitsch-Wilder type without quite getting there. On second viewing, I conceded that it was much sharper than I gave it credit for, particularly about vanity. Of course, I love it partly because it's about a magazine editor; my fantasy scene is where dragon editor Meryl Streep has lovely assistant Anne Hathaway poised at her shoulder to tell her who every guest is at a party (I could use one of those). And, of course, Hathaway's stance mirrors my own semi-fascinated, half-hearted, love-disdain for fashion. I have a feeling that this film will get better and better with age.

The Entity

Sidney J. Furie (US, 1981)

By Michael Atkinson, critic, US

There may not be, outside of David Cronenberg's wonder cabinet, a more nitro-powered horror-movie metaphor hell than that fueling this post-*Exorcist* remnant, in which Barbara Hershey plays an ordinary working-class woman (supposedly based on a real person) who is repeatedly attacked and raped by a huge, invisible being. Aurally and visually calibrated like a taser, Sidney J. Furie's movie doubles down on the genre grittiness, then wallops you with unrelenting trauma; the bizarre prosthetic effects, of Hershey's body being manhandled and screwed by unseen hands and body parts, would be merely one of the most lashingly surrealist visions in American film if it weren't also deeply upsetting on so many levels that it's like the movie is writing its own library of fiery feminist theory. The anxiety the film produces was too hot to handle, and after years of delays it was dumped, only to be semi-rediscovered by Austrian

experimentalist Peter Tscherkassky in 1999 and re-edited as his short 'Outer Space'. It remains unnerving and savage, arguably the most eloquent movie ever made in Hollywood about the struggle of the sexual underclass.

L'Été meurtrier

Jean Becker (France, 1983)

By Geoff Andrew, head of film programme, BFI Southbank

Released at a time when many were dazzled by the then fashionable *cinéma du look* (*The Moon in the Gutter* was made the same year), this subtle yet seemingly more conventional crime movie by the son of Jacques Becker has endured rather better than much of the output of Beineix, Besson et al. The film depends primarily on its sturdy script, which shifts with surprisingly smooth ease from what at first looks like a perky comedy of sexual mores (newly arrived coquette Isabelle Adjani ignites male lust and female gossip in a Provençal village) to an altogether darker, more complex study of treachery, falsehood, obsession and revenge. As events are related from different perspectives, expectations are confounded, stereotypes stripped away to reveal credibly conflicted individuals, and motivations properly muddled rather than simply explained away. Like the Georges Delerue score, the cast – which includes such stalwarts as François Cluzet, Edith Scob, Michel Galabru and Suzanne Flon – is an index of the overall classy craftsmanship, but in Adjani's remarkable performance, at once forcefully raw yet technically refined, the film explores depths as unsettling as they are revealing.

Excalibur

John Boorman (US, 1981)

By Kieron Corless, *Sight & Sound*

A student ghetto in Leeds, the early 1980s. A dedicated economy of pleasure prevails, its currencies being bodily fluids, copious alcohol and drugs, and recently discovered VHS tapes. Films are viewed communally, in the stygian gloom of dimly lit front rooms in various heightened states. There was a much simpler accounting of a film's worth back then: in the words of one of my long-lost compadres, either "fackin' superb" or "fackin' shit". In the former category was Boorman's *Excalibur*. I can't remember much about the film itself, more the sensation of stupefied surrender, an almost mystical communion not dissimilar, perhaps, to the film's own rapturous immersion in a mythical, pre-rational universe. I've an abiding impression of thunderous Wagnerian overload, interspersed with quieter moments; an emerald-green world charged with potent poetry and primitive

magic; the conviction and intensity of Nicol Williamson as Merlin. It registered as profoundly erotic too. Has Helen Mirren ever been hotter than she is here, playing the evil Morgana? And there's a sex scene where Arthur shags his wife on a table while still wearing his armour (you won't find that in Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*). I never saw *Excalibur* on the big screen, but still, at times it felt like you were actually in the film, as if the distance between viewer and film had been obliterated, so you became, as Jeff Koons once said, "a little lost in the fantasy". Today, I still couldn't tell you whether *Excalibur* is any good or not. It's possibly kitsch, portentous 1980s nonsense, but I prefer not to watch it again, particularly now I'm permanently sober, and sully the few memories that remain of it.

The Falcon and the Snowman

John Schlesinger (US, 1985)

By Maria Delgado, academic and critic, UK

Whenever I see the phrase "adapted from a true story" in the opening credits for a film, I expect a worthy, earnest product boasting 'fidelity' to its source material. Here Schlesinger opts for something different. There's a murkiness of both mood and character motives, as Steven Zaillian's screenplay melds espionage thriller with slacker movie, all drawn from Robert Lindsey's investigative study of two home-grown all-American spies nurtured in the bosom of respectable, bourgeois society. These childhood friends, who conspire to sell CIA secrets to the Russians, function as a portrait of the dismembered American psyche in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Timothy Hutton is the 'good' Catholic boy disillusioned by the culture of underhand surveillance to which he is privy; Sean Penn is his loose-lipped, fallacious co-conspirator. The latter is superb as the jerky dealer-cum-addict spiralling out of all control as the pressures pile up. Volatile and vulnerable, his characterisation of the hapless Lee announces the manic energy and technical precision that has marked all his subsequent performances, from the shady lawyer in *Carlito's Way* to the crusading activist in *Milk*.

Femme Fatale

Brian De Palma (France, 2002)

By Sam Dunn, head of DVD, BFI

After a devastating performance at the US box office, *Femme Fatale* limped its way into the UK marketplace as a straight-to-DVD title with little fanfare and barely a murmur from critics. It was followed by the longest period of inactivity in De Palma's career, a four-year silence only broken when *The Black Dahlia* and *Redacted* were offered up in surprisingly quick succession. Packed with all of the classic themes and concerns that made such earlier works as *Sisters*, *Obsession* and *Blow Out* so great (mistaken identity, artifice, doubling, voyeurism etc), *Femme Fatale* is both a kind of greatest hits package, delivered in bravura style, and a truly entertaining and stylish experience that goes as far as any of De Palma's most celebrated films in deconstructing the nature of cinema and exploring the relationship between truth and representation. To call this manipulative picture puzzle the last great film of De Palma's extraordinary career is a no-brainer, but to say that it's among his finest works is probably closer to the truth.

Footloose

Herbert Ross (US, 1984)

By Jane Lamacraft, critic, UK

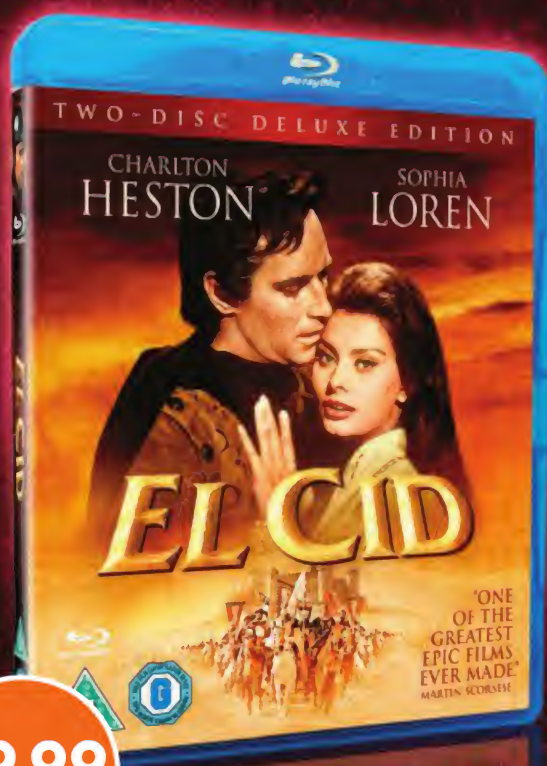
Kevin Bacon plays Ren McCormack, a city teen who relocates from Chicago to the Midwest sticks, where he finds that rock music and dancing have been banned by John Lithgow's Bible-thumper.



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Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

■ Lori Singer (who beat Madonna to the role) struts her stuff as Lithgow's daughter Ariel, a sassy missy so keen to kick the small-town dust off her red cowboy boots that, as her friend Rusty (Sarah Jessica Parker) says, she "probably memorises bus schedules". A battle to stage a prom ensues, and for once the Hollywood diktat – that down-home values always vanquish city-slicking ways – is turned on its head. It has you from the get-go: the opening sequence is a toe-tapping montage of variously attired pairs of feet dancing to Kenny Loggins's title track. Nearly three decades on, Bacon's vest-clad set-piece dance in a flour mill looks cheesily 1980s, but the rest of Ross's drama wears its age well, real song-and-dance joy for the pre-*Glee* generation. Watch it now, before the remake (with Dennis Quaid in the Lithgow role) hits your screens.

Galaxy Quest

Dean Parisot (US, 1999)

By Ben Walters, critic, UK

It's no easy feat for a film to simultaneously spoof a genre and deliver the goods on its own terms. The *Scream* franchise, inaugurated in 1996, stands out on this front, but *Galaxy Quest* deserves as much praise. Tim Allen, Sigourney Weaver, Tony Shalhoub and Alan Rickman play veterans of a *Star Trek*-style television show, nursing their variously bruised egos on the fanboy circuit before being sucked into space by credulous aliens who mistake them for their last, best hope. The joke is that they turn out to be just that. The cast is superb, deftly negotiating the turn from has-been testiness to self-surprising heroism, and the

script, by David Howard and Robert Gordon, is clever and knowing but also copper-bottomed and heartfelt. The real achievement is the film's treatment of fandom, clear-eyed about its absurdities but unrepentant in celebrating the passion and even romanticism beneath the nerdiness.

The Godfather Part III

Francis Ford Coppola (US, 1990)

By Armond White, *New York Post*, US

It is a great injustice that critics deny *The Godfather Part III* (1990) any of the effusive acclaim given *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974) – this mistake overlooks the great power of *Part III* as Coppola complicated and fulfilled his project. Coppola elevated the gangster movie by importing art-movie strategies into the time-folding structure of *Part II*, then in *Part III* he added self-referential details and casting that certifies the autobiographical ethnic immigrant legacy. The object of *Part III* is to personalise a Hollywood genre that had become the folly of superficial movie-brat appreciation. Michael becomes American cinema's greatest character since Scarlett O'Hara by embodying the 20th-century dilemma of upholding American identity while being conscious of the country's contradictory, sometimes immoral acts; his punishment and long-delayed confession reunites the *Godfather* saga with a Catholic sense of sin and provides the series (and Al Pacino's stages-of-man performance) with well-proportioned unity. Despite a few flawed sequences and performances (though not Sofia Coppola's cosseted Mary, an uncannily contemporary product of the depravity Don Vito

began) violence is shown to exact its cost. The narrative thrust of the first two films require this – they are incomplete without it. *Part III* matters because Michael, the corrupted American scion, finally repents. Unfortunately, repentance – the emotion that gave Greek tragedy its power – is what *The Sopranos* era has eliminated.

Grégoire Moulin contre l'humanité

Artus de Penguern (France, 2001)

By Philip Kemp, critic, UK

Artus de Penguern is best known as an actor – he played the blocked writer Hipolito in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001) – but he also directs, and his first and only feature could be conceived as the anti-*Amélie*. Both films share a heightened, stylised vision of Paris but where in Jeunet's saccharine whimsy everybody can be redeemed by the power of sweetness and innocence, de Penguern's city of dreadful night is peopled by crazed monomaniacs whose vindictive fury can be stilled only by violent death. The film's view of humanity is relentlessly and hilariously bleak. Relations between the sexes are a disaster area; almost everyone has been maltreated, cheated on or dumped, and the nearest to a harmonious couple are a pair of predatory sex maniacs. Almost everybody teeters on the edge of homicidal violence; the only sane people Grégoire (de Penguern himself) encounters in his nightmare odyssey are some mild-mannered porters from the Rungis meat market, and inevitably it's them he attacks when he finally snaps. *Grégoire Moulin* mines a vein of gleefully misanthropic comedy rarely seen on screen since the heyday of W.C. Fields.

Hangin' with the Homeboys

Joseph B. Vasquez (US, 1991)

By Michael Brooke, critic, UK

This smart, funny, wordly-wise portrait of four young men of assorted ethnic heritage opened too close to the hype-magnet *Boyz n the Hood* to have a chance of striking out on its own. Despite good reviews it was deemed too similar and tanked at the box office. But, as Karen Alexander pointed out in *S&S* (December 1991), it's an almost vanishingly rare example of early 90s New Black Cinema that offers an intelligently critical study of its protagonists' masculinity instead of excusing and/or celebrating its excesses. Johnny has academic ambitions, Vinny – aka 'Fernando' – mimics Dennis Christopher in the similarly charming *Breaking Away* (1979) by pretending to be Italian, Tom has dreams of acting stardom, while Willie's favourite catchphrase anticipates (and may have been ripped off by) Ali G a decade later as he responds to every self-inflicted setback with a knee-jerk: "It's because I'm black, right?" Some of the plotting is clunky (Johnny's romantic dreams are shattered by a wildly implausible coincidence) and the female characters needed far more rounding for the underlying message to hit home, but it's an infinitely better and indeed more genuinely charming film than its title suggests.

Henry V

Kenneth Branagh (UK, 1989)

By Graham Fuller, critic, US

I first saw Kenneth Branagh's sombre directorial debut in the Cannes market, where presumably it was shunted because of the French Revolution bicentenary. Despite the allegations of hubris then levelled at its maker, the film seemed revelatory as a post-Falklands War denunciation of imperialist warmongering. Many viewings since have reinforced my opinion that it's one of the finest of all Shakespeare movies, up there with Dieterle and Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Welles's *Othello* and *Chimes at Midnight*,



Final Destination 3

James Wong (US, 2006)

By Nick Pinkerton, critic, US

Part three was my point of entry to this very original horror franchise, but any of the other instalments would do. Bringing ankle-high expectations to the multiplex, I saw *Final Destination 3* with a loud crowd in downtown Brooklyn and was smitten with the concept's ingenuity. Not taking kindly to feeling cheated, Death picks off the survivors of freak accidents one by one. In this episode, the carnage occurs on a derailed, no-brakes rollercoaster – the other films concern escapees from an airliner explosion, a freeway pile-up and a speedway disaster, each graphically hallucinated before a (temporary) precognitive deliverance. Death, as it happens,

has a terrific sense of humour, and goes about evening the score by setting in motion intricate chains of everyday happenstance that end in spectacularly violent kills – mousetraps built better with each passing sequel. "Fuck death!" shouts a defiant jock here, moments before a weight machine pulps his head. This may seem puerile, but it's a flicker of originality in a genre increasingly dedicated to cannibalising its past, and it disquiets the spectator in a new way, for more of us honestly suspect that we'll die in some ridiculous, left-field and embarrassing Act of God rather than at the hands of a nutter with a mask.



Ross's drama 'Footloose' wears its age well, real song-and-dance joy for the pre-'Glee' generation – watch it now, before the remake hits screens

Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, Kozintsev's *King Lear* and Olivier's own *Henry*. Branagh's bold imports from the *Henry IV* plays, showing the significance of Falstaff for Prince Hal and the Boar's Head crew, mesh perfectly with Henry's monarchical isolation on the night before Agincourt, as does Bardolph's hanging, which Olivier, minding British wartime morale, omitted along with the Scroop conspiracy. In keeping the latter episode, Branagh laid bare the exigencies of medieval *realpolitik*. Stylistically, the film constantly astonishes – the subtle tracking shot that follows Branagh's spine-tingling Saint Crispin's Day speech and the bravura 500-foot track across the Agincourt carnage betokened similar sequences in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Atonement*.

Hudson Hawk

Michael Lehmann (US, 1991)

By Naman Ramachandran, critic, UK

This box-office turkey (\$65 million budget, \$17 million takings), universally reviled by critics and shunned by audiences, deserves a re-evaluation. Upon repeat viewing, it is difficult to see why the film was so disliked. Bruce Willis, the charismatic lead, was at the height of his popularity having just come off *Die Hard 2*. The plot, by Willis and Robert Kraft, about a brother-sister pair attempting world domination by controlling Da Vinci's gold-making machine, is enjoyably hokey but certainly no more outlandish than, say, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The dialogue (Steven E. de Souza and Daniel Waters) bristles with anarchic one-liners. Marx Brothers purists will shudder, but the film is so full of wisecracks that it requires a second viewing to appreciate them all, like *Duck Soup*. And the sharply

edited sight gags are evocative of Buster Keaton in his pomp. Plus, as the Mayflower siblings, Sandra Bernhard and Richard E. Grant are among the best comic villains ever. And any film containing the immortal line: "If Da Vinci was alive today, he'd be eating microwave sushi, naked, in the back of a Cadillac with the both of us," can't be bad, as the legions who have made the film a DVD hit will testify.

Hustle & Flow

Craig Brewer (US, 2005)

By Trevor Johnston, critic, UK

The story of a Memphis pimp who fancies himself as a hip-hop artist seems made for the ersatz redemption Hollywood thrusts upon us on a regular basis. Not in the hands of writer-director Craig Brewer, however, who treats his film's characters and circumstances with unfailing respect, who clearly knows the terrain (Memphis is his home town) and who gets a magnificent performance from stalwart supporting actor Terrence Howard, who absolutely nails the central role. His Djay is a canny operator, adept at

HOOD WINKED:
'Hangin' with
the Homeboys'



keeping his working girls in line, but then discovers another side of himself while putting together a demo tape to press into the palm of Ludacris's local-boy-made-good when the rap star passes through his old stomping ground on the Fourth of July. While that make-or-break confrontation is taut as cheese wire, the landmark sequence here is when Howard and cohorts lay down their tracks in a jerry-rigged home studio, the act of conjuring music from silence proving so unexpectedly primal it gives them a life-changing sense of self-worth. In this inspirational yet far from saccharine moment, Brewer reveals his true agenda, a potent statement of the human potential going to waste in divided America's forgotten inner-city streets.

The Icicle Thief

Maurizio Nichetti (Italy, 1989)

By Guido Bonsaver, academic and critic, UK

This is a film that should appear in every anthology of postmodernist cinema. It marks the peak of Maurizio Nichetti's film genius: he co-wrote the script, directed the film and played two different characters. It tells the story of a film director who shoots a remake of De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, then watches as its television screening is totally messed up by a Berlusconi-type commercial channel that continuously interrupts the black-and-white film with colourful adverts. The director tries to intervene but, in the process, causes a surreal fusion of three different levels of reality – the neorealist remake, the adverts and the director's life – with the funniest of consequences. But *The Icicle Thief* is not just a successful comedy of errors; it contains a heartfelt homage to neorealist cinema and conveys a serious point about the damage to film culture and to Italian society inflicted by the increasing power of commercial television.

Impulse

Graham Baker (US, 1984)

By Adrian Martin, academic and critic, Australia

The specialty of British-born director Graham Baker (*Omen III: The Final Conflict*, *Alien Nation*) is the subtle exaggeration of disquieting incongruities in the daily world. The storyline of *Impulse* gives him the perfect premise. One day, for no apparent reason, ordinary people start acting out of impulse, shedding all forms of civilised restraint. In most movies this would lead to grand dramatic gestures: utopia or apocalypse. *Impulse* refuses these options. Neither divine nor evil, Baker's characters stay close to the banal everyday. Although a little sexual licence flowers in dark doorways around town, the impulse these ordinary folk indulge in is acting out peeved, spiteful fantasies – the kind of aggression that arises from life's root daily, nagging irritations. After the revolution, what happens in *Impulse* is that a typically harried bank customer is now willing to shoot the people in front of him to get ahead in the teller's queue; or a little old granny, sick of waiting for the traffic light to change, will gleefully ram her car into it.

Isn't She Great

Andrew Bergman (US, 2000)

By Ryan Gilbey, 'New Statesman', UK

One scene embodies the unsung sassiness of this razzle-dazzle, no-warts-at-all biopic of Jacqueline Susann, author of high-trash bestseller *Valley of the Dolls*. Before she hits the big time, Susann is moping in the street after another rejection. When, she wonders, will her luck change? "I'm 29 years old," she sighs. "Yeah, right," scoffs a passing businessman. "Fuck you!" she responds – the joke being that Bette Midler, who plays Susann, was 52 at the time. In other words, this is a biopic that knows it's a biopic. ➔

Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

Even the elisions (the near-exclusion of Susann's autistic son, the prettified account of her death from cancer) comment on the whole genre's compromised nature. The movie is infectiously upbeat but never twee: the garish colours tickle our eyeballs and Paul Rudnick's script has champagne bubbles in every other line. The showbizzy cast is a knockout: Midler, Stockard Channing, David Hyde Pierce, John Cleese, Amanda Peet and the incomparable Nathan Lane, an icon of the overlooked if ever there was one.

Jennifer's Body

Karyn Kusama (US, 2009)

By Hannah McGill, critic, UK

The simultaneous hype and opprobrium dealt out to star Megan Fox and writer Diablo Cody – as geek-combusting megababe and hipster queen respectively – rather swamped this film upon release. And with Hollywood groaning with come-of-age kids whose lives were changed by *Heathers* or *Election* or *Mean Girls*, a degree of fatigue now attends every perky parody of carnivorous high-school mores. So, why favour this one? Because throw out all the packaging it came in, and it's surprisingly eloquent about the pain of adolescence and the contradictions associated with female power. The near-erotic intensity of teenage female friendships; the death cult that reliably possesses sensitive boys and girls at a particular age; the can't-win teen-girl conundrum of being equally derided for innocence and experience... *Jennifer's Body* captures all of this with an eloquence that almost feels misplaced within its trashy trappings. Sure, it's got its silly bits and its horror effects and school slang will date as rapidly as these things do, but unlike Cody's far more celebrated *Junio* – from which feelings were brutally excised to make way for witticisms – it's frank, funny and empathetic about female identity-forming and the ravages of hormonal change.

Joan Lui – Ma un giorno nel paese arrivo io di lunedì

Adriano Celentano (Italy, 1985)

By the Ferroni Brigade, Austria and Germany

Who would make a film like this today? It's a monumental, monstrously expensive, madly inventive experimental musical about the Second Coming of a Christ who arrives into a world of violence, corruption and hypocrisy that looks strikingly like modern Italy, whose apostles are left-wingers of all kinds, and who'll sing 'n' dance it out with evil incarnate to save mankind from a fate it likely deserves. Only during the 1980s, that decade of decent mass enlightenment, could you pull one like this – and only if you were the last real European star, a pop-cultural axiom, a one-man industry/genre. *Joan Lui* was a financial fiasco of singular proportions and critics were always too bland-brained to appreciate Celentano's flamboyant genius. Today, one watches the film and weeps for all that lost greatness and kindness.

Keeping Mum

Niall Johnson (UK/US, 2005)

By Mar Diestro-Dópido, 'Sight & Sound'

Beautifully twisted and dark, not to mention utterly English, Niall Johnson's understated comedy tells of a murderous old housekeeper (Maggie Smith) – a sort of inverted Mary Poppins – who pops up one day to take care of the dysfunctional family of a good-natured village vicar (Rowan Atkinson) who's lost touch with his job, his wife (Kristin Scott Thomas) and his teenage daughter (Emilia Fox). Blessed with a crisp, perfectly pitched script, much of the pleasure of *Keeping Mum* derives from watching an outstanding cast relishing a golden opportunity – including the late Patrick Swayze as a seedy American golf trainer.



A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY: 'The Last Starfighter'

Atkinson and Thomas underplay and syncopate brilliantly around the overwhelming wit and charisma of Maggie Smith, who unsurprisingly steals the film. There's more than a nod to Ealing productions of yore, such as *The Ladykillers*, as the film plays skilfully with our expectations by delivering its shocking elements offhandedly and within a polite, decidedly English suburban milieu, while still managing to feel new and contemporary. With sharp, ingenious comments on marriage, sex, old age and religion, the quiet affability of *Keeping Mum*'s surface subtly conceals a critical take on the small-village mentality, portrayed here as the true menace lurking within the disturbingly oppressive charm of a certain traditional Englishness. It definitely deserves cult status.

The King

James Marsh (US/UK, 2005)

By Catherine Wheatley, academic and critic, UK

Back in 2006 I was the only person to select James Marsh's debut feature in my contribution to *S&S*'s films of the year poll and assumed my critical faculties had failed me. Others were not kind to *The King*; indeed *Variety*'s Todd McCarthy expressed particular distaste, condemning the film as "noxious" and "aggravating", before taking Marsh to task for the film's uneasy occupation of a middle ground between atmospheric emphasis and docudrama intensity. Yet as 2008's much-lauded *Man on Wire* has borne out, it's precisely this quality that gives Marsh's films their discomforting hold over us. Revisiting *The King* today, it's remarkable how much Marsh's Southern gothic prefigures another pair of critical hits from that year, namely *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*. It was Marsh, not P.T. Anderson, who first connected the angular, earnest severity of Paul Dano with religious zealotry, casting him alongside Gael García Bernal as the Abel and Cain sons of a Texan preacher played by William Hurt (an underrated classic himself). It was his film, before the Coens', that squeezed out an opihidian narrative that went nowhere we expected it to but that was constantly infused with the faint, nauseating stench of unfathomable evil. *The King* is worth seeing for these reasons and many more, but especially for one indelible tracking shot that features towards the film's end. It's dreadful and gorgeous, and lingers with me even – perhaps especially – on the brightest of days.

Knowing

Alex Proyas (US, 2009)

By David Jenkins, 'Time Out', UK

Critic Roger Ebert was – I think – the first person to review *Knowing*, and not long after his rave write-up appeared on the internet, a wave of vicious pans dismissing it as sub-Shyamalan hokey followed. This prompted Ebert to write a follow-up blog in which he restated his admiration. He admits that the plot of the

film is preposterous (it's wilfully distasteful too!), but to insist on its inconsistencies and pretensions is to ignore what makes the film so pleasurable and distinctive. For one, there's a neat dovetailing of theme and form, as it's a film about hysteria that plays out at hysterical pitch. This is bolstered by the involvement of Nicolas Cage, who scurries about sweating, shouting, locked in his own private universe – the Kinski comparisons were there for the taking long before *Bad Lieutenant*. Cage plays a renegade astrophysicist sporting gravity-defying hair who discovers a series of numbers that prophesy an Old Testament-style day of reckoning. In between *National Treasure*-style code-breaking waffle there are extraordinarily vivid and disturbing scenes of catastrophe: one in which Cage surveys the appalling wreckage of a recently crashed passenger plane evokes Andrei Rublev observing the brutality of the Tartar invasion of Vladimir. How many popcorn movies can you say that about?

The Last Starfighter

Nick Castle (US, 1984)

By Patrick Fahy, BFI

Deemed in its day a mere *Star Wars* clone, Castle's charming and uplifting wish-fulfilment adventure for teenage boys has all the panache of the Lucas/Spielberg adventure that inspired it but with an added freshness of tone. Put-upon trailer-park teen Alex is whisked off into space to fight an alien armada, after proving his skills on an arcade game that he didn't know was the intergalactic equivalent of a job interview. Jonathan Betuel's witty script boasts robust cameos for Robert Preston and Dan O'Herlihy as unlikely aliens, romantic comedy (Alex's robot replacement on earth twitching amusingly at girlfriend Maggie's attentions) and a twist that brings good out of our hero's initial reluctance to fight ("Save the whales but not the universe?"). Grounded in credible atmosphere, with amiable leads, imaginative visual effects and Craig Safan's beautiful score, the film (one of the first to be entirely computer generated) soars above the sum of its parts.

The Love Guru

Marco Schnabel (US, 2008)

By Vic Pratt, curator, BFI archive

Describing a "new low" for Hollywood comedy, *S&S* reviewer Michael Atkinson was mystified by *The Love Guru*'s flat jokes, declaring it "a thumbscrew experience". I get the feeling he may not have liked it. Like it. Mike Myers reminds me of Jerry Lewis. Like his misunderstood predecessor, Myers follows his comedy wherever it takes him, however bewildering it may be; regardless of the critics, he dares to be silly. Undaunted by the seeming permanence of a Hollywood movie, he showcases slight material others might think twice about for a late-night sketch show. Undeniably, *The Love Guru* is hit-and-miss stuff. Yes, it includes a bizarre restaging of the pop video for Extreme's 'More Than Words', but it is precisely this kind of mind-boggling non-sequitur that makes this a genuinely surprising film. Buried deep within this dangerous shambles is Myers's self-centred comedic one-man show; writing, starring, powering the film with his ego, he ensures that somewhere, amid the mass of material that doesn't come off, erupts the occasional brilliant joke.

The Man in the Moon

Robert Mulligan (US, 1991)

By Isabel Stevens, 'Sight & Sound'

On its release, veteran director Robert Mulligan's final film bypassed audiences, while critics largely derided it as sentimental. At a time when teen movies meant classroom hierarchies, prom woes and a script full of



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Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

catchy one-liners, Mulligan's gentle coming-of-age melodrama must have seemed the kind of film your dad would make. And yet the anguish of unrequited love was just as tenderly sketched by Mulligan in 1950s rural Louisiana as it was by Hughes and co in the corridors of an urban high school. Reese Witherspoon – in her debut role – carries the film as Dani, a 14-year-old tomboy who ditches Elvis to pine over the boy next door, 17-year-old Court. The languorous summer setting (lyrically shot by Freddie Francis) makes it all feel like a memory, while Dani's tentative flirtation with Court is just the right mixture of goofy and adorable. But then, just after their first kiss, what you've feared all along will happen does happen. Bewitched by her older sister, Court doesn't even look at Dani and heartbreak is administered in the most casual of phrases: "Goodbye kid."

Menace II Society

Allen Hughes, Albert Hughes (US, 1993)

By Dylan Cave, curator, BFI archive

This film divided critics, not least in the UK, where its depiction of violence among amoral Watts teenagers was regarded as offensively one note. *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) was the crowning glory of a new cycle of urban gangster movies and, to some, *Menace II Society* marked a downturn in the genre towards mindless glorified violence. And yes, it is brutal, episodic and one note, but then the lifestyle the film depicts is vicious, directionless and emotionally stunted. Without the moral guidance of *Boyz's* father figures, the *Menace* teens have no sense of right or wrong. Ruthlessly blasting away innocent strangers but tongue-tied in the presence of grandparents, these gangsters aren't striving to reach the top of the world, they just want to survive it.

Midnight Run

Martin Brest (US, 1988)

By Ali Jaafar, critic, UK

No buddy movie ever got as close to poetry as Martin Brest's *Midnight Run*. Smarter than *48 Hours*, jazzier than *Lethal Weapon* and more profane than *Stakeout*, the film – about a bounty hunter (Robert De Niro) charged with bringing in an accountant (Charles Grodin) on the run from the Mob – ticked all the high-concept boxes required by 1980s cocaine-fuelled Hollywood executives. Car chases, exploding helicopters and equally inept Mafia hitmen and FBI officers punctuate a relentlessly simple story elevated to near-perfection by George Gallo's eminently quotable screenplay. Featuring career-best work from Brest – just watch the director's later *Meet Joe Black* as evidence – and featuring a supporting cast having so much fun they almost let Yaphet Kotto's sunglasses run away with the film, *Midnight Run* ultimately belongs to Robert De Niro and Charles Grodin. Their exchanges as the chain-smoking, ulcer-suffering Jack Walsh and the deceptively whiny Jonathan 'The Duke' Mardukas resemble a bullfight on ice. "I suffer from aviophobia... I also suffer from acrophobia and claustrophobia," Mardukas informs Walsh at one point. "If you don't cooperate, you're gonna suffer from fistophobia," comes the inevitable reply.

O.C. and Stiggs

Robert Altman (US, 1985)

By David Jenkins, 'Time Out', UK

How is it possible that a film whose entire narrative is framed as a prolonged crank call to Gabon's then-president Omar Bongo is not a mainstay of the retro/cult screening circuit? Altman's pungent, unloved satire – about two aberrant hipster high-schoolers and the summer they spend terrorising the right-wing, nouveau-riche suburbanite Schwab family – not only



NO SHORT CUTS: Altman's satirical 'O.C. and Stiggs'

repays repeated viewing but almost demands it with its ultra-scathing humour and typical 'controlled chaos' structure. Leisurewear'd patriarch Randall Schwab (Paul Dooley), head of Arizona's Schwab Insurance, makes a hell of a hate figure, citing "drinking" and "the continent of Africa" as personal bugbears on his hilariously shonky, western-inspired television infomercial. Though one might view the film as a more sophisticated, less winsome retooling of John Hughes's *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), it's more in the anarchic spirit of *Nashville* or *Brewster McCloud*, and Altman clearly has no time for learning, trusting, bonding, growing or symbolically taking a boot to daddy's Ferrari: *O.C. and Stiggs* celebrates teenagers as wild, impulsive, obstructive, obnoxious and politically astute, thereby making a complete mockery of the so-called teen movie.

One True Thing

Carl Franklin (US, 1998)

By Kenneth Turan, 'LA Times', US

Nothing is harder to do and given less critical respect than films that successfully offer honest emotions in a mainstream way. Maybe it's because failed attempts at these kinds of pictures can be marred by contrived and mechanical sentimentality, maybe it's because it is too easy to denigrate them as 'women's pictures' in the rush to celebrate, say, the latest horror auteur. But viewers who revisit films like *One True Thing* will find that this family drama starring Meryl Streep, Renée Zellweger and William Hurt is above all a human story, honest and compassionate about its characters and accessible to anyone willing to feel. Though his background was in darker films such as *One False Move* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Franklin and screen-

IT'S A WRAP: Bill Murray in 'The Razor's Edge'

writer Karen Croner (working from the Anna Quindlen novel) understood that the complexity of personal relationships is the most compelling of subjects. Their belief in the power of simple things, the transcendent nature of the ordinary, is riveting. By exercising restraint, *One True Thing* creates the space necessary for audiences to react fully, allowing us the freedom to step forward and embrace the emotion, making it completely our own.

Palmetto

Volker Schlöndorff (US/Germany, 1998)

By Geoffrey Macnab, critic, UK

Volker Schlöndorff's foray into *film noir*, loosely based on a James Hadley Chase novel, is on the self-conscious side. Schlöndorff's admiration for Billy Wilder is well chronicled and at times in *Palmetto* he tries a little too hard to emulate Wilder's *Double Indemnity*. The critics excoriated the film, with *Variety* calling it a "routine exercise" in "noir-by-numbers". Nonetheless, the film delivers exactly what it promises – namely sex, murder and mayhem. Woody Harrelson is enjoyably venal, confused and easily swayed as the reporter just released from jail after trying to expose wrongdoing. The stickiness of the overheated Florida setting accentuates the lust and corruption of the characters, while Schlöndorff throws in all the elements you'd expect – the garish femme fatale (Elisabeth Shue), the precocious stepdaughter (Chloë Sevigny) and a wildly overdetermined plot. What makes the film effective and enjoyable is the skilful way it balances irony and self-mocking humour with hard-boiled genre elements.

A Perfect Getaway

David N. Twohy (US, 2009)

By Nick Pinkerton, critic, US

A Perfect Getaway's set-up is as simple as its resolution is devious (and the title is dull). Two young couples team up while they are hiking perilous trails through the Hawaiian wilderness towards a remote beach, paranoid with rumours of a recent thrill-killing in Honolulu. Narrative information is filtered through the yuppie couple, Cydney and Cliff (Milla Jovovich and Steve Zahn), and the viewer shares their suspicions, which first land on a roughneck couple of hitchhikers, and then on their new travelling companions, Gina and Nick (Kiele Sanchez and Timothy Olyphant). Everything about macho Nick is dodgy; he seems a compulsive liar who spins yarns about his exploits as a "goddamn American Jedi" in Special Ops and imagines himself played by Nicolas Cage in a biopic (complete with impersonation). Perfectly tuned performances sustain the movie. Olyphant excels at amiable intimidation, while Zahn, his shapeshifting physique revealed strategically by writer-director Twohy, more than fulfils his half of their territory-marking contest. *A Perfect Getaway* also entertains a quiet subtext of class anxiety. Just tumble with the final rug-pull and appreciate the pleasures of its well-turned sleight of hand.

Pineapple Express

David Gordon Green (US, 2008)

By Charlotte Garson, 'Cahiers du Cinéma', France

In 2008, a mainstream wind blew through the American independent scene. Even director Peter Sollett, who had shone with *Raising Victor Vargas* (2000), began filming New York from a West Coast viewpoint, having swapped *Victor Vargas's*

unknown teenagers from the Lower East Side for rising star Michael Cera in *Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist*. That same year, *Pineapple Express* mixed several genres in a cocktail unfairly dismissed as facile when the film actually radicalises every genre it touches. In the hands of the *Superbad* writing team of Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg the buddy-movie aspect, for instance, plays up the blatant homosexual subtext to a declaration of friendship from weed dealer James Franco to unwitting murder witness Seth Rogen in the woods: "You know how they say, 'Don't dip your pen in company ink?' Well, I'm totally glad I dipped my pen in your ink." The stoner-movie aspect is also subverted; joint smoking would generally justify the characters' delirious state but here they are constantly drawn back to reality. *Pineapple Express* finally becomes an action film in a climactic assault on a vast marijuana plantation by "the Asians". It's the most mainstream aspect of the film, but is followed by an epilogue in which Red, a common ally of the heroes who received a stomach injury yet came back to save them, shares a diner breakfast with them and pledges his friendship as a "BFFF" (Best Fucking Friend Forever). He is still bleeding profusely but, like the effects of the "pineapple express" [a powerful marijuana strain], those of genre quickly dissipate, leaving these immature teenagers stuck between childhood and a golden age.

The Razor's Edge

John Byrum (US, 1984)

By Michael Atkinson, critic, US

Unpredictable and freakishly sad, this all-but-unseen Somerset Maugham adaptation, a vanity project for Bill Murray (his reward for the *Ghostbusters* franchise), remains one of the most disquieting, off-kilter movies of the Reagan administration, a portrait of spiritual craving lit up by an irrational warmth but also spiked by money-zombie class-war satire not too far from Fassbinder's *Whity*, and by Murray's irrepressible lapses into hyper-irony, arriving in flashes and making Margaret Dumont out of the rest of the cast. This might be the best Larry Darrell we'll ever have, equal parts deadpan clown, genuinely befuddled nowhere man and utter mystery; in other words, he is a complete person, running with his very private devils. Murray's sense of lostness gives the film extra dimensions – is it Murray, Darrell or both running so awkwardly for the foxhole in the war scenes? Is that persistent throat-lump signal representative of the actor's unease or the character's? Director John Byrum, perhaps inadvertently, imbues the movie with the buzz of an elegiac fever-dream, but it's the disarming details, from Murray/Darrell's mocking seal impersonation to his cheek-press against his murdered lover's lips in a Paris morgue, that stick in the memory like little heartbreaks.

Ronin

John Frankenheimer (US, 1998)

By Nick James, *Sight & Sound*

When I first saw *Ronin*, it answered a deep need. When the *Ronin* archetype was later fed wholesale into *The Bourne Identity*, it seemed that this need was widespread. My appetite for this kind of thriller comes partly from Melville – his compelling worlds of bleak, wordless, professional machismo – and partly from all those cool television series I grew up with like *Danger Man*, *The Saint* and *The Avengers*. *Ronin*, though, is nothing like as self-aware. It's a simple rogue-heist-gang set-up, with an IRA cell hiring mercenaries to steal a macguffin before the Russians get it. Frankenheimer favoured conspiracy thrillers set in colour-bleed historic European backgrounds (see *Year of the Gun*, 1991) but *Ronin* feels like the happiest of accidents. De Niro, as the former CIA



Return to Oz

Walter Murch (US, 1985)

By Sophie Mayer, academic and critic, UK

I was the target demographic when *Return to Oz* was released: bored on holiday at the seaside (outside the cinema there was a promotional tour bus with a wind-up Tik-Tok) and far too young to get the alternately camp and tragic associations attached to the original *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Murch's adaptation of two later books in the Oz series was as brilliant a nightmare as you'd expect from the editor of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Conversation*. Not that I knew that then; I was simply deliciously scared of Princess Mombi's gallery of heads, of the shrieking Wheelers (Murch's sound design coming up trumps) and of the implacable Nome King. There's no kindly wizard here, only a resourceful, wide-eyed, firmly non-singing Dorothy and her talking chicken Billina. Handed a \$25 million budget by Disney, Murch made some odd decisions, chicken and electroshock therapy included. The film tanked in the US, but – proof of a true cult classic – it's the subject of fan documentary, *Return to Oz: The Joy That Got Away* (2007), and it launched the wild career of its young star Fairuza Balk, Hollywood's first goth outsider chick.

man, was supposed to be coasting his latter-day career, but being paired with twinkly Jean Reno seemed to wake him up and showed what a responsive team player he could be when surrounded by the flavourful likes of Stellan Skarsgård, Jonathan Pryce, Sean Bean, Michael Lonsdale and the coltish Natascha McElhone. And there's that outstanding car chase through Nice with De Niro and Reno flying in a bronze Mercedes 450 SEL 6.9. Something about *Ronin* makes you watch it with your foot rammed into an imaginary accelerator. "Draw it again. It's a simple diagram, draw it again."

The Runaways

Floria Sigismundi (US, 2010)

By Jane Giles, head of content, BFI

The Runaways is that rare bird, a female coming-of-age movie. This fact, plus its 15 certificate, the box-office curse of being a biopic and some sniffy reviews (cinematographer Thomas Townend described first-time writer-director Sigismundi as having "the structural sensibilities of a spider on LSD") resulted in a film that was overlooked by nearly everyone. Real-life fragile dreamer Cherie Currie (Dakota Fanning) is plucked from the dance floor of Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco in mid-1970s LA by impresario Kim Fowley (Michael Shannon) to join the phenomenal Joan Jett (Kristen Stewart) in a barely legal, attitude-heavy all-girl rock band. The Runaways hit the road to play support in a string of dive bars, but with Fowley

forever at the twisted end of a telephone wire they're soon signed to Mercury and making it big in Japan. Unable to walk the line between entertainment, experimentation and exploitation, Cherie cracks and everything falls apart – while Jett goes on to record the anthem that sold ten million copies, 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll'. George Hickenlooper's documentary *Mayor of the Sunset Strip* (2003) shows how close *The Runaways* is to the real-life spirit and look of its subject. Sigismundi was influenced by such true-life music/drug features as *Christiane F.* (1981) and *Sid and Nancy* (1986), and was stylistically inspired by characteristic 1970s filmmaking. It's also easy to see connections with the work of John Waters, as well as with similarly overlooked cult movies such as *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (1979). With all this, plus a killer soundtrack (Iggy Pop, David Bowie, Suzy Quatro, the Sex Pistols – and a sensitive moment with Don McLean), I'm just so glad that *The Runaways* is out there waiting to find its audience. It's a real blast.

Session 9

Brad Anderson (US, 2001)

By Tim Robey, *The Daily Telegraph*, UK

American genre-whizz Anderson is the definition of underappreciated. With the sole exception of *The Machinist* (2004), his films have all struggled to achieve a release in cinemas outside the US. For *Session 9*, a single-location psych-horror creep-out that has since achieved cult status, this fate seems especially undeserved. Peter Mullan does tremendous, nuanced work as the harassed foreman of an asbestos cleaning crew who take a cut-rate job clearing out an abandoned mental asylum and find the history and decrepit emptiness of the place affecting them more than they'd like to admit. Anderson, who co-scripted with cast member Stephen Gevedon, makes the mounting dread of their discoveries – including hokey but unnerving tape recordings of a former patient with multiple personality disorder – interestingly oblique motors for suspense, while the fraying work ethic gives David Caruso, Josh Lucas and Brendan Sexton some good, panicked moments. The movie's inspiration and real star is the location itself – the actual, abandoned Danvers State Hospital, a winged red-brick bat of a building, gutted and dank, which squats on a hill outside Boston. Like the Saltair amusement park in Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* (1962), it's a place that summons its own ghosts the second we're inside.

Seven Minutes in Heaven

Linda Feferman (US, 1985)

By Adrian Martin, academic and critic, Australia

On the production side of this film, only Fred Roos and Zoetrope will ring a bell with cinephiles; from the cast, only Jennifer Connelly has fulfilled the promise she showed as a teenager. But *Seven Minutes in Heaven* is one of many modest 1980s gems that reminds us of a brief flowering in genre-driven creativity that was neither mainstream nor indie and that gave opportunities to many women to make what turned out to be their only feature films. Natalie (Connelly), Jeff (Byron Thames) and Polly (Maddie Corman) are ordinary teens, not much past puberty. They argue with their parents, struggle with school assignments and wonder about love and sex. Director and co-writer Feferman lightly disrupts the patterns of their lives in order to engineer ambiguous, exploratory, liminal moments: Jeff sleeps over at Natalie's place after running away from home, while Polly heads off to a big city to pursue a rock star she reveres. Nothing more momentous than a bit of kissing happens, and the film delivers nothing more cathartic than a smile and a group skate. But *Seven Minutes in Heaven* is at every moment charming, witty and playful.

Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

The Signal

Dave Bruckner, Jacob Gentry, Dan Bush (US, 2007)

By Anton Bitel, academic and critic, UK

On New Year's Eve in a city called Terminus, society descends into chaos as televisions, radios and cell-phones emit a signal that unfetters people's ids, leading to madness and murder. Yet such pandemonium merely forms the apocalyptic background to this low-budget indie, where the tempestuous psychodynamics of a love triangle are presented in three linked episodes (or 'transmissions'), each made by a different writer-director, each told from a different character's point of view, and each boasting a radically different style and tone, from slasher thriller to black farce to mind-melting pathos. With its split-personality approach to narrative and its disorienting presentation of unreliable perspectives, *The Signal* draws viewers right into its delirium, messing with our mood response and manipulating our fears and desires. This reflexive confusion of medium and message offers a bludgeoning interrogation of the impact that the video image can have on humanity's fragile psyche. Updating George A. Romero's *The Crazies* (1973) for the digital age far more imaginatively than Breck Eisner's 2010 remake, this terrifying, funny and haunting film merits several viewings.

Spartan

David Mamet (US, 2003)

By Adam Lee Davies, critic, UK

There was a time when David Mamet's scripts for *The Untouchables* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* – hell, even Anthony Hopkins and Alec Baldwin's outward-bound shouting match *The Edge* – were filling out the

multiplexes, while as a director he was also holding the arthouse crowd rapt with such spare, formalist, precision-tooled gems as *House of Games* and *The Spanish Prisoner*. Then people just didn't seem so interested any more. It's a shame because arguably his best work came after those glory days: in *Heist*'s long-con machismo, in the genre-expanding fight club of *Redbelt*, and in overlooked secret service drama *Spartan*. An outwardly simple political thriller in which Val Kilmer's Delta Force-type goes rogue to rescue the president's daughter, *Spartan* is so aware of it's own boiled-down purity and flinty meticulousness that it ought to buckle under its own weight. Thanks to Mamet's seasoned deceit, the weights and measures of genre expectation are balanced into so delicate an equilibrium that any unexpected shift in plot or character swings the film into arcs of geometric unpredictability and on towards a shattering conclusion.

Static

Mark Romanek (US, 1985)

By Kim Newman, critic, UK

When Mark Romanek directed *One Hour Photo* (2002), it tended to be seen as the music video maven's first feature, an impression the director himself tried to foster, though when I interviewed him about *Static* in 1985, he seemed justifiably pleased with how it had turned out. Co-scripted by star Keith Gordon, who was about to embark on his own undervalued but fascinating career as a director (*The Chocolate War*, *A Midnight Clear*, *Mother Night* and *Waking the Dead* also fit this list), it's a strange story about an inventor who develops a machine to "make people happy, not sad", which turns out to be a television set that shows Heaven. It has a Lynch-like feel for the small-town

bizarre, as represented by the protagonist's odd day job (weeding defective crucifixes out of a production line for religious artefacts) and the sunstruck desert Christmas backdrop. The film is bewildering, sometimes close to whimsical, but its wit, humanity and unique outlook stay in the mind. You can tell how skewed from normality the picture is because Amanda Plummer, usually typecast as a loon, plays the anchor of sanity in this world.

Streets of Fire

Walter Hill (US, 1984)

By Ryan Gilbey, 'New Statesman', UK

Hill is justly celebrated for *The Driver* (1978) and *The Warriors* (1979), but *Streets of Fire* has fallen through the cracks. The picture is like a rock 'n' roll song played out in comic-strip panels; it shares key DNA with *Alphaville* and *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension*, *Dick Tracy* and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*. Set in a nocturnal, neon-singed and studio-bound 1950s city that resembles a giant Americana gift shop (diners, leather jackets, elevated subways, motorcycles), it's rendered with a 1980s style and saltiness, much as *Far from Heaven* would later bring 21st-century explicitness to Sirkian melodrama. The characters here are mere stereotypes: the lone warrior, the chanteuse, the biker. Acting is manifestly not required, though Willem Dafoe, as the cadaverous villain, does some anyway. The movie's pulpy joy lies in its loving distillation of decades of US pop culture myth-making into 90 rhapsodic minutes.

The Sure Thing

Rob Reiner (US, 1985)

By Kate Stables, critic, UK

Released at the high point of the 1980s teen-movie boom, this warm, well-crafted and unexpectedly winning film has been overshadowed in the collective memory by the John Hughes/Cameron Crowe monopoly on high-quality youth dramas. Buried beneath the kind of leering title obligatory in that era and the *Porky's*-style marketing is a classical Hollywood three-act romantic comedy. It adroitly reworks Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934) as a college road trip, replete with crisp battle-of-the-sexes banter, beer-shotgunning and, unusually for then and now, a couple punching at the same weight. John Cusack's Gib, hitching cross-country to a fabled trophy girl at UCLA while bickering his way into love with Daphne Zuniga's uptight classmate Alison, is the first and one of the best portrayals of the wisecracking, insecure outsider he incarnated in the 1980s. Reiner's character-based humour makes *The Sure Thing* the smartly comic counterpart to the adolescent angst of Crowe's *Say Anything* (1989), the frolicking script giving off an authentic tang of freshman confusion over first moves and first love. It's a movie that's funny, insightful and rueful about youth's conflicts between sex and love, a triffet eluding its crasser contemporaries that were hell-bent on frisky business.

The Switch

Josh Gordon, Will Speck (US, 2010)

By Paul Julian Smith, academic and critic, US

The Switch was buried on release by films on the same theme: the critically acclaimed *The Kids Are All Right* and forgettable Jennifer Lopez vehicle *The Back-up Plan*. And what could be more insulting than the premise that star Jennifer Aniston, being too plain to get a date, has recourse to a sperm donor? Yet this turkey-baster romcom deserves critical respect. As the lovelorn best friend who drunkenly switches his sperm with that of the dumb hunk employed by Aniston's character, Jason Bateman is as smart and funny as he was on television's *Arrested Development*.



That Thing You Do!

Tom Hanks (US, 1996)

By Trevor Johnston, critic, UK

Sweetness has never been a highly prized celluloid quality. We want bleak, we crave conflict. In that respect, it's not easy to make a case for Tom Hanks's sole feature credit as writer-director, a rites of passage tale involving a one-hit pop band circa 1964, which remains defiantly cheery even as the boys blow their chance at the big time. While Hanks himself is sometimes avuncular, sometimes shark-like as the Play-Tone Records exec who spots potential pay dirt in youthful beat combo The Wonders, and Johnathon Schaech's ego-driven frontman supplies the plot reversals, the movie's most invested in

Tom Everett Scott's drummer, who amiably learns that the journey is about more than the destination. He's gangly and likeable in the John Gordon Sinclair mould, and there's something Forsythian about the film too, always alive to the telling diversion (including Bill Cobbs as a passing jazz legend and Rita Wilson's warm-hearted waitress). No, it's not exactly a cliché-free zone, but the period feel is bright and breezy, the charm factor not inconsiderable and the whole thing just puts a smile on your face even after numerous viewings. Maybe not one to admire: it's one to love.



Rob Reiner's 'The Sure Thing' adroitly reworks 'It Happened One Night' as a college road trip, replete with crisp battle-of-the-sexes banter

Bateman, for once allowed leading-man status, reinvents the New York neurotic as a troubled but sexy update of Woody Allen. Playing the requisite side-kicks with more skill than the roles require are a dignified Jeff Goldblum and a riotous Juliette Lewis. Aniston lends surprising dignity to a role that could have played into her tabloid image as she-who-gets-dumped. A sharp script and deft direction lead to an unconvincing happy ending. But *The Switch* is proof that the dumbest premise, if treated with wit and style, can produce a sharp and moving experience.

Throw Momma from the Train

Danny Devito (US, 1987)

By Ben Walters, critic, UK

With this film, *The War of the Roses* (1989) and *Death to Smoochy* (2002), Danny Devito carved out a niche as a director of the cinematic equivalents of 98 per cent chocolate: bitter as hell but delicious all the same. In this riff on *Strangers on a Train*, he casts Billy Crystal as Larry, an also-ran writer whose ex-wife is the latest literary hot potato, and himself as Owen, put-upon son to a monstrous mother and Larry's least promising writing student. Grabbing the wrong end of the stick, Owen sets in motion a criss-cross murder plot that has Larry aghast then intrigued. There's plenty of enjoyment to be mined from the deliciously accelerating plot and miscommunications but the film is also painfully alive to the frustrations of the creative process and family obligation, frustrations that dovetail with exquisite intolerance in Anne Ramsey's Momma, nonchalantly dripping *mots justes* from one corner of her mouth and guilt trips from the other.

Tin Cup

Ron Shelton (US, 1996)

By Tom Charity, critic and programmer, Canada

Tin Cup is no more about golf than *Raging Bull* is about boxing. And if we accept that Robert De Niro's Jake LaMotta is a portrait of male anger, impotence and

self-loathing, then how about Kevin Costner's Roy 'Tin Cup' McAvoy as the half-celebratory, half-appalled apotheosis of the middle-aged, Middle American man-child in all his narcissistic vainglory? Writer-director Shelton is pigeonholed as 'the sports-movie guy', but he looks to Peckinpah as his benchmark, and he's as close as we've come to a latter-day Howard Hawks. Another analogue is Michael Mann, if you substitute bats and balls for guns and sports cars, self-mocking humour for earnest self-importance, and the sexual cut-and-thrust of screwball banter for moody silences. All Shelton's films (they include *White Men Can't Jump*, *Cobb* and *Dark Blue*) are worth seeing and, with the exception of *Bull Durham*, they have all been underrated. The poky, lopsided *Tin Cup* may not be his masterpiece, but as a paean to the poetry of bullshit and the romance of failure it stands way out on its own.

Tombstone

George P. Cosmatos (US, 1993)

By Graham Fuller, critic, US

Kevin Jarre wrote a superlative script about the 1881 Gunfight at the O.K. Corral and the ensuing Cochise County War, wherein Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday revenged themselves on the cowboy faction that had killed Morgan Earp and wounded Virgil Earp. Jarre started to direct the film too, but was quickly fired, allegedly for not thinking visually. Cosmatos replaced him, occasioning walkouts and more dismissals, and Kurt Russell, cast as Wyatt, supervised the slashing of Jarre's opus by 29 pages. A structural mess focusing

JUST GOOD FRIENDS: 'The Switch'

on an oddly directionless protagonist, the film has neither the *noirish* claustrophobia or psychological complexity of *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford's mythical Earp classic), nor the dreariness of Lawrence Kasdan's *Wyatt Earp* (which was planned as a *Tombstone* spoiler). But if Cosmatos went overboard in the gothic sequence that culminates in Wyatt's hysteria at Morgan's assassination, he also brought buckets of panache to the saga, which plays as a seething frontier *Godfather* and surely helped to seed *Deadwood*. Val Kilmer is mesmerising as the ice-cool, tubercular Doc, especially brilliant when mocking with a silver whisky cup the flashy pistol-twirling of Johnny Ringo (Michael Biehn).

Trespass

Walter Hill (US, 1992)

By Philip French, 'The Observer', UK

Hill came to the forefront of Hollywood directors in the 1970s with a succession of laconic, stylised action movies in the tradition of Walsh, Hawks and Siegel, though his work is also indebted to Melville and Peckinpah. His later films failed to find popular or critical favour, though his television work, most notably the defining first episode of *Deadwood* (2004) and the mini-series *Broken Trails* (2006), are highly regarded. However, in the early 1990s he made three movies, the thriller *Trespass* and the westerns *Geronimo* (1993) and *Wild Bill* (1995): all remarkable, yet little remarked on. *Trespass* was initially withheld from distribution after the 1992 LA riots, and while the script is credited to Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis, it's unmistakably a Hill movie and ranks with his best. Bill Paxton and William Sadler play Arkansas firemen drawn to run-down post-industrial East St Louis by a map recording a precious cache of loot long hidden in an abandoned factory. The building is unfortunately the secret HQ of drug dealers, and a violent running battle ensues. It's a clever conflation of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *Treasure Island* in a modern urban setting, and the tension never lets up. Ry Cooder's score is outstanding.

Two Idiots in Hollywood

Stephen Tobolowsky (US, 1988)

By Adam Lee Davies, critic, UK

The VHS years produced such an immense raft of slipshod, speculative awfulness that it's tempting to consign the whole lot to the dump. However, buried within this decade-long barge of bilge were such odd and fiery nuggets as this cracked comedy. The story revolves around the relocation of a couple of fortysomething defectives from Dayton, Ohio to the ashy tract housing of east LA. Tobolowsky (best known as the terminally annoying insurance salesman Ned Rye-son in *Groundhog Day* and for writing *True Stories* with David Byrne) nudges the misaligned satellites of unchecked idiocy and cinematic daring towards an event horizon of structural audacity and breakneck cutting that glimmers impressively with dark shards of self-reflexive wit and curves along a mean bend of narrative pliancy. So the film transmutes its back-alley production values and ragged conception into a magnetic aria that will astound those attuned to such funky stuff. The ghosts of William Castle, Godard and Woody Allen are all honoured in a film that manages to be both shockingly amusing and amusingly shocking.



Forgotten pleasures of the multiplex

Unlawful Entry

Jonathan Kaplan (US, 1992)

By Geoffrey Macnab, critic, UK

Unlawful Entry was one of a number of yuppie-in-peril films that came out in the early 1990s. Its director Jonathan Kaplan, best known for *The Accused*, was a graduate of the Roger Corman school of exploitation fare (he made *The Student Teachers* and *Night Call Nurses* for Corman). He has gone on to work extensively in television drama. Kaplan has made some duds along the way (for example, *Bad Girls*) but he is a prime example of a director who brings intensity and artistry to genre work. *Unlawful Entry* stars Kurt Russell and Madeleine Stowe as the yuppie couple and Ray Liotta (fresh from his triumph in *Goodfellas*) as the deranged cop who terrorises them. Kaplan skillfully ratchets up the tension and the film plays like a companion piece to Scorsese's version of *Cape Fear*, with a larger-than-life villain preying on clean-cut protagonists. However, alongside the predictable genre elements, the film touches on deeper issues: the corruption of the LAPD (the film was made around the time of the Rodney King case) and the creeping uncertainty and anxiety of white, middle-class America in the face of the big, bad world beyond its heavily protected homes.

Victor Victoria

Blake Edwards (UK, 1982)

By Edward Buscombe, academic and critic, UK

Blake Edwards rarely had his just desserts. When he died last year, obituaries were scarcely better than respectful, and David Thomson in his *The Biographical Dictionary of Film* is downright dismissive. Though Edwards was highly rated by *Movie* magazine in the mid-1960s, the consensus is that his later career was a huge disappointment. But there are gems, always with strong performances (Edwards was originally an actor): Peter Sellers in *The Party* (1968), Dudley Moore in *10* (1979) and Kim Basinger in *Blind Date* (1987), all genuinely funny films. And then there is *Victor Victoria*, starring Edwards's wife Julie Andrews. The film is a dazzling exploration of gender-bending, with Andrews never better in the title role as a woman passing as a man who is a female impersonator. Edwards's movie is a remake of a remake, having been first a German release of 1933 (*Viktor und Viktoria*), then a British musical of 1935 starring Jessie Matthews (*First a Girl*). The director sets his film in Paris in the 1930s, with Robert Preston (quite wonderful) playing the gay lover of 'Victor' and James Garner as the gangster who falls for her (or is it him?). At times one can get quite dizzy trying to find solid ground as Andrews slips in and out of the sexes (and occasionally in and out of her clothes).

The Village

M. Night Shyamalan (US, 2004)

By Jonathan Romney, *The Independent on Sunday*, UK

It's hard now to imagine a time when Shyamalan wasn't a synonym for vainglorious myth-making buffoonery – and yet the genuinely surprising understatement of his quasi-debut *The Sixth Sense* had some critics invoking Henry James. His fourth film as a genre specialist, *The Village*, was the last convincing thing he has made, and its exoticism and perversity mark it out as an audacious anomaly among Hollywood genre films. On its release, viewers – watching for the signature Shyamalan Twist – prided themselves on having out-guessed the premise from the start, but that's not the point. Packing a double twist that addressed the nature of deception and our willingness to be deceived (by filmmakers and politicians alike), Shyamalan's parable of hysterical insularity offers a baroque representation of the American



SUITS YOU: Griffith and Ford in 'Working Girl'

national psyche and its roots. The film's neo-Lovecraftian fancies – its pop evocation of a Nathaniel Hawthorne past, its bizarre woodland creatures, its hugely eccentric recasting of Little Red Riding Hood as a Waif in Yellow – make *The Village* as powerfully visual a piece of storytelling as has been produced in Hollywood in recent years, its parable-like simplicity a bewitching anomaly in an age of crowd-pleasing false complexity.

The Wisdom of Crocodiles

Po-Chih Leong (UK, 1998)

By Kim Newman, critic, UK

A deceptively quiet British vampire movie, directed by Po-Chih Leong, which deconstructs the odd relationship between vampire and victim that has become fetishised in the subsequent 'vampire romance' craze. Bulgarian immigrant Steven Griscz (Jude Law), apparently a wealthy medical researcher, is a one-of-a-kind mutant ('a mistake... a crocodile who needs a job') who feeds on crystalline substances (akin to kidney stones) created in his lover-victims' blood by their emotional reactions to him. Law (always best cast as non-humans) underplays effectively as the unusual monster, trapped in a cycle of love and betrayal that forces him to share (literally) the feelings of the women (Kerry Fox, Elina Löwensohn) he kills. Timothy Spall is the policeman who thinks having no vowels in a name ought to be illegal, and gets close to seeing what the monster is. British-born Leong, who made Hong Kong movies before this and has subsequently been a direct-to-DVD hired hand for Steven Seagal and Wesley Snipes, seems a little influenced by Peter Greenaway in the use of throwaway art direction to characterise the protagonist, with Löwensohn shocked in the vampire's lair not by a coffin or a corpse but by a wall of pencil sketches of his previous victims.

Women of the Night

Zalman King (US, 1999)

By Brad Stevens, critic, UK

King is generally regarded (perhaps by individuals who haven't actually seen his films) as a purveyor of cheap sleaze for the softcore porn market. But for me, the five features he directed during the 1990s comprise an unbroken series of masterpieces: *Blue Movie* (1991), *Delta of Venus* (1995), *Shame, Shame, Shame* (1998), *In God's Hands* (1998) and *Women of the Night*. The last of these is an insanely ambitious work that tells its complex story – about a blind female disc jockey who narrates three interconnected tales, and is herself part of a tale being narrated by another DJ – in an elliptical manner that's strikingly Godardian, with voiceovers and editing that reduce the various

narrative components to their most basic elements ('fire, sirens, cops, jail'). Wildly mixing arthouse abstractions, music video stylistics, ironic gangster action and unironic romance, while advertising itself as a piece of commercial erotica, this is a film so totally hidden from our cultural guardians that it feels free to be virtually anything, including a traditional melodrama whose aesthetic fragmentation reflects the fragmentation of those long-lost communal audiences that once flocked to see the melodramas of Sirk, Minnelli, Vidor and Preminger.

Working Girl

Mike Nichols (US, 1988)

By Carmen Gray, critic, UK

In an era of big schemes and bigger hair, this 1988 romantic comedy was a high point for actress Melanie Griffith. As baby-voiced, ambitiously scheming knockout Tess McGill she has echoes of Marilyn Monroe in her best comedies. But far from the gold-digger of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Tess – a Manhattan corporate secretary – uses canny smarts not vampishness to get ahead. Wonderfully, the film doesn't see this as a reason to repress her sex appeal. In a mischievous affirmation of all forms of female power, she says: 'I have a head for business and a bod for sin. Is there anything wrong with that?' The recipient of this famous line is investment big-wig Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford) in a hilarious meet-cute scene at a merger party, where she's accidentally sozzled through mixing valium and tequila. The film's buoyant with such screwball situations and witty dialogue, as she steals the identity of conniving boss Katharine (Sigourney Weaver), who's attempting to pass off Tess's deal idea as her own. The film came out just a year after *Wall Street*, and is similar in not condemning ballsy capitalist ambition itself, just unscrupulousness as opposed to honest graft. When Tess finally gets her own office – and secretary – she makes it clear she hasn't forgotten her Staten Island working-class roots, and in camaraderie with her assistant won't be expecting her to fetch her coffee. It's a simple Hollywood fairytale, but in its irreverent, sassy take on gender politics, a bracing one.

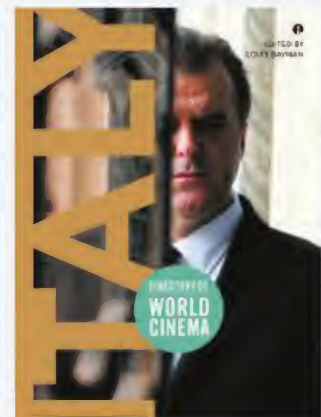
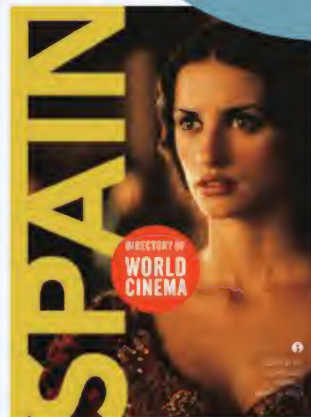
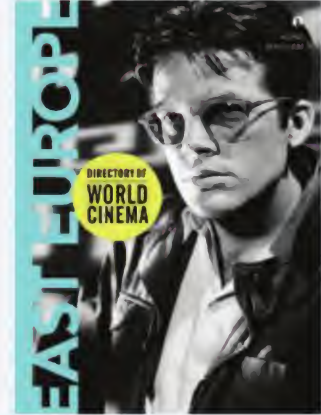
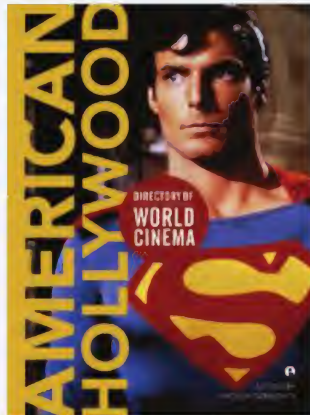
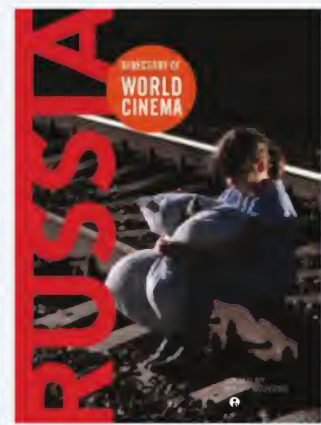
Year One

Harold Ramis (US, 2009)

By Kent Jones, critic, US

If Jack Black is in a movie, I'll gladly part with \$10 to see it with an audience. Make that \$30, because my sons are always eager to join me. At this point, he seems to be suffering from a backlash. I find this mysterious, because as far as I'm concerned he doesn't make enough movies. Zach Galifianakis is the one who needs a break. Come to think of it, I would gladly trade the collected works of Will Ferrell for one raised eyebrow from Jack, before which the collective pomposity of Hollywood filmmaking crumbles into dust. By the way, I sort of like Will Ferrell. What makes *Year One*, no doubt proudly inspired by Mel Brooks's glorious *History of the World Part I*, so special? Is it Harold Ramis's way with a sight gag, like the hilarious ox-cart chase? Wrong. Is it Michael Cera's overgrown winsome child act? Not quite. Is it Hank Azaria's lisping, circumcision-crazed Abraham ('I'll be right back to cut your penises') or David Cross's paranoid Cain ('I didn't kill my brother, okay?') or Oliver Platt's ridiculously hirsute high priest? Wrong again. If I'm feeling down, all I have to do is think of Jack Black munching on an apple from the Tree of Knowledge, pausing for an insight and announcing that he feels 'intelligenter', and the sun shines once more.

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First published more than 20 years ago, Kim Newman's seminal work, *Nightmare Movies*, has retained its place as a true classic of cult film criticism. This updated edition, published by Bloomsbury, reassesses his earlier evaluations and includes analyses of the last two decades of horror films with

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To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these films was NOT part of Dario Argento's 'Three Mothers' trilogy?

- a. Trauma
- b. Suspiria
- c. Inferno



OZU YASUJIRO: DVDs of 'An Autumn Afternoon' and 'Late Autumn' to be won

The BFI continues to champion Ozu Yasujiro with its release of *An Autumn Afternoon* and *Late Autumn* on a dual format edition. Both follow Ozu's common theme of matchmaking. In the former, Ozu's final film, a concerned father is eager to find a husband for his faithful daughter. *Late Autumn* sees a group of businessmen trying to matchmake for a widow. Both features are complemented by early Ozu films never before available in the UK – *A Hen in the Wind* and *A Mother Should Be Loved*, respectively, and come with fully illustrated booklets with newly commissioned essays. There are three pairs to win.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Who produced the music for 'An Autumn Afternoon' and 'Late Autumn'?

- a. Saito Kojun
- b. Ito Senji
- c. Mayuzumi Toshiro



WIN

BLU-RAY PLAYER + FILMS: 'Taxi Driver' and 'The Bridge on the River Kwai' to be won

WIN



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Following extensive restoration, *Taxi Driver* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* make their way to Blu-ray for the first time. David Lean's World War II adventure is a collector's edition featuring a host of extras, such as four featurettes and footage of William Holden and Alec Guinness on *The Steve Allen Show*. On the *Taxi Driver* 35th anniversary edition, exclusive material includes an interactive 'Script to Screen' feature plus the original 1986 commentary from Martin Scorsese. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Home

Entertainment, we have the films to give away with a Sony Blu-ray player as a top prize. We've also got four runner-up prizes of both films.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. After filming 'The Bridge on the River Kwai', what was Alec Guinness's next film with David Lean?

- a. Doctor Zhivago
- b. Oliver Twist
- c. Lawrence of Arabia

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During its 20th-century heyday Italy's film industry was second only to Hollywood as a popular film factory and tackled a range of genre filmmaking. In *Cinema Italiano*, (published by I.B. Tauris), Howard Hughes appraises some 400 films, including classics by Luchino Visconti, Sergio Leone,

Federico Fellini, Mario Bava and Michelangelo Antonioni, among several other key directors. Discussing both mainstream and arthouse cinema, the book traces directorial careers and is illustrated throughout with rare stills and film posters. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. For which of these films did Fellini win an award at the Venice Film Festival?

- a. Nights of Cabiria
- b. La Strada
- c. Il Bodine



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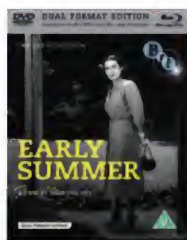
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If there's a common theme at the core of Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's last three features, it's 'the father' – fathers who hold on to their place in society; fathers who use the excuse of tradition to retain power; fathers who have sent a generation of sons to war. In his latest feature *A Screaming Man* (*Un Homme qui crie*) the father in question, Adam (Youssef Djaoro), is a man who finds himself paralysed in an Africa in transition. When the hotel where he works as a swimming-pool attendant is taken over by new Chinese owners, he finds himself stripped not just of his job, but of his future, his voice, his whole place in society. As assured as it is pared down, Haroun's film looks into the heart of a man and his family living in a country gripped by never-ending civil war.

Youssef Djaoro has acted in all three of these films, and *A Screaming Man* can be seen as the final part of a triptych that began with *Abouna* (*Our Father*, 2002) – in which the father is absent and his two abandoned sons set off in search of him – and continued in *Daratt* (2006), in which a son seeks to avenge his father's murder, only to find himself taken into the home of the killer, a mute baker, who becomes an unlikely surrogate for the dead father, teaching the young man bread-making and forgiveness.

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun was born and grew up in Chad, but was forced into exile when he was 18, after being shot during the country's civil war. He spent several years wandering the world, working at odd jobs all the way to China, before settling as a journalist in Bordeaux and making his first short films in the mid-1990s. Since then he has returned again and again to Chad to film a country and a people trapped in the same ongoing civil war, examining the heart-wrenching question: what is it that makes fathers send their sons to die?

As both an outsider and an insider in his native land, Haroun presents audiences with enough distance to observe and understand his characters, while at the same time his films burn with a sense of frustration – with a yearning for peace and beauty to return to his home country. It is this dual perspective that makes his films universal rather than parochial, full of emotions and images that haunt the memory well beyond the end credits. **Suzy Gillett:** 'A Screaming Man' won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2010. That the film was in the main competition – as opposed to in a sidebar like *Un Certain Regard* – seemed like recognition, finally, that African cinema is an integral part of the culture of cinema.

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun: When I sent the film to Cannes to be selected, the selectors called to say they liked it, but didn't know which section it would be put into. While I was waiting for the

reply, I called two very good friends of mine – Wasis Diop, who did the music for the film, and Claire Denis – and told them, "If the film is selected for *Un Certain Regard* or *Out of Competition*, I'm not going to accept. If people say, 'Oh, the film wasn't selected,' I just want you both to know what happened." Then Cannes called me and said, "This is a beautiful film and it is obvious it should be in the main competition." It was great news.

For me my obsession is how to enter African cinema into the history of the world. We have been absent for so long, we can't start playing in the tenth division. The fact that we have been invisible for so long means we have to catch up. It is important for the next generation, and film audiences, to sense that there is progress – that something is going on!

SG: 'A Screaming Man is not a Dancing Bear' is the title of a poem by Aimé Césaire, the French-Martiniquan poet, politician and champion of Négritude. Was it his poem that inspired the film, or did your idea arise another way?

M-SH: It was more the situation I twice found myself in, filming in Chad with my crew of foreign technicians, who were French, Burkinabé, Belgian. In 2006, while filming *Daratt*, we were caught in an attack by the rebel forces and couldn't move, and in 2008 the same thing happened when we were filming *Expectations*, the short film I was making for a commission by the Jeonju Film



PATERNAL DUTY
The figure of the father – including Adam (Youssef Djaoro, right) in 'A Screaming Man' – looms large in the films of Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, left



*Himself a victim of the long-running civil war in Chad, director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun examines the turmoil in his native land via 'A Screaming Man', an austere and compelling story of fatherhood. He talks to **Suzy Gillett***

SHADOW OF THE FATHER



Mahamat-Saleh Haroun A Screaming Man

Festival in Korea. I felt completely responsible for all these people who were around me – who had come all the way from Paris and from Ouagadougou. I wanted to scream my rage, but against who? And what would that have changed other than making myself feel better?

It was then that I found I had a scream inside me that I couldn't get out, and afterwards I thought about Césaire. I reread the book [*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*] and found this extraordinary passage, and I said to myself, “*Voilà!* Perhaps it's that – a screaming man is not a dancing bear.” There is a form of civility in Africa that consists of showing the positive side even while people are living incredibly difficult lives, and it is that idea that brought me to the verses of Aimé Césaire.

SG: When I was watching this film it felt like the end of a trilogy that you had started with 'Abouna' and 'Daratt', which both trace the stories of fathers and sons. The first two are about the absent father, and this one is centred on the father who sends his son away, so it is inverted.

M-SH: Absolutely. It's like a triptych around the same themes. I centred *A Screaming Man* around the father, but was really inspired by being taken hostage by this civil war. Then I looked at how I could treat the theme with something very

intimate and familiar, and I took the situation of a Chadian family – and in particular the relationship of father and son. Because in this situation [the civil war in Chad], which has gone on for over 45 years, there seems to me to be a transmission which is going on from father to son: the war is essentially fought by men and young men, and it continues – we push them forward into it.

SG: Sacrifice them?

M-SH: That's it.

SG: So the civil war in Chad is still ongoing?

M-SH: It's not finished. The war is still going on.

SG: In 'A Screaming Man' there is also the fascinating character of the Chinese hotel owner, representing the way China is buying up Africa.

M-SH: Well yes, things are happening quite discreetly, as the Asiatic idea of propagation has it: we don't make a lot of noise, we move in, install ourselves discreetly. It's happening in Chad – there are lots of Chinese moving in, though maybe not as many as in Senegal or in Mali. I was inspired by a Chinese woman who lives in N'Djamena [the capital of Chad] and bought a hotel, and it was in thinking of her that I created Madame Wong.

It is these different fronts of combat that little people like Adam are confronted with. Not only is

there the civil war, but there is also globalisation and how to deal with the political, economic and social situation. People like Adam become immobilised – simply because they live in societies that have no organised unions, or any kind of organisation that gathers people in collectives.

The more Africa – or at least Chad – embraces modernity, the more it loses what solidarity in itself it had. Globalisation and capitalism isolate people, so there is no common force [against it], and that's how it wins. And in Africa this goes against the fundamental culture of the society there, because people show a lot of solidarity in their daily lives, and it is their solidarity – used against the problems they are confronted with on a daily basis in many countries in Africa – that enables them to survive situations that would be catastrophic in other countries and other cultures. If globalisation is putting that solidarity in danger, the situation is serious enough for it to be filmed.

SG: What's also very powerful in your films is the space you create with colour and light, even in urban scenes, where you locate your characters in the enclosed space of the domestic compounds – and here also the hotel's enclosure.

'My characters are like lions in a cage, and at some point lions who are kept locked up for a long time lose their minds'

GENERATION GAP

Adam (Yousouf Djaoro, top) sees his life collapse when he loses his coveted job as a hotel swimming-pool attendant to his son Abdel (Diouc Koma, below)



M-SH: This enclosure is also reality – it shows how my characters are caught in a trap. And they are not sure how to escape from it. They are like lions in a cage, and at some point lions who are kept locked up for a long time in a circus lose their minds. We crack, and this is what happens to Adam. His horizon is limited, and when our horizon is limited we are forced to invent something to escape from this daily grind and imprisonment.

In the scenes around the [hotel] swimming pool with Adam, it's like a theatre stage with different actors, and it gives him the illusion that he is not enclosed and not threatened. It creates a window for him that opens on to other things, and he clings to it like a means of breathing. It's his oxygen, and when it's taken away from him he feels he will suffocate.

SG: Let's go back to the question of fathers and sons. Can I ask you what your relationship was like with your father?

M-SH: I don't have any particular problems with my father. We have an excellent relationship. He is a father we would all dream of having in Chad, but I know that my father is an exception. And perhaps because of the education he gave me, I am free to observe the other fathers and make portraits of them to show what they are doing. My father gave me everything I needed to succeed. But my peers in Chad were held back in their stride by their own families, because fathers in Chad have a predatory way about them: they will practically trace the path upon which you will travel, who you will marry, what particular studies you will do.

My father left me to do whatever I wanted to. So it is not astonishing that in Chad I am the only director who is free to speak in the press about religion and society and so on – because my father allows me to. I think most fathers in Chad are like the father I portray in *A Screaming Man*. And that is due to the education of my father. Which in turn is no doubt due to my grandmother.

She was an only child. She divorced my grandfather when my father, who is almost 70 today, was six. She fled to the desert, taking her son with her on a horse. Her husband, who was an officer in the king's court, sent soldiers on horses to chase her, and they took my father back and left her to go on her way. Some 64 years ago she did this act, which even today most women in Chad would not be capable of doing. She never remarried and never had any more children.

And it was this woman with such a strong character who brought me up. She told me stories and taught me how to tell stories, and so I owe my temperament to this woman and also to her son, my father, who was also an only child – who was also brought up by her and so inherited her temperament. We are just the product of our own stories – so you need to hear other people's stories to understand why they are at such and such a place.

SG: Who are the cinematic influences on your films?

M-SH: In this film there are influences in the editing, in the sense of ellipsis, in the stripped-down style of the directing, in the absence of artifice – there's something very bare which I really owe to Bresson. I'm really happy, as I was



CHILD OF WAR
In Haroun's 2006 film *'Daratt'*, above, a son seeks revenge on the man who killed his father

given the Robert Bresson Prize during the Venice festival. I'm really proud of that. But I also owe an aesthetic to certain kinds of Asian cinema. With the meal scene with the father, son and mother, I render homage to Ozu.

The western is also an important genre for me, because it was all I could see in the cinemas when I was growing up in Abéché. In westerns there is the sense of space, and there is this same space in this part of Chad, which is so desertified. In the last few years I've been rediscovering John Ford. His simple stories are still quite layered. Even in films when he was given the story and told to go and make it, he goes off like a good soldier to complete his mission. I am like that: I've got a story to tell, and I go off with the same ethic.

SG: What about painters? I remember when you came to London in 2001, you were looking at Caravaggios, in search of a certain light.

M-SH: That was for *Abouna*, but painters are not influences, they are references. This time I wanted to use the light in its pure form – not ask the cinematographer to refer to any particular painter, but to show the light in its reality, which in Chad is quite violent.

SG: *'A Screaming Man'* has a different DP from *'Abouna'* and *'Daratt'*, the French cinematographer Laurent Brunet. This time you also produced the film yourself, via your own company [Goï-Goï Productions]. Is this a move towards a new path?

M-SH: I don't know if it is a new path or not. It is just that circumstances mean I now have people who can take care of the production, so I have been able to have my own production company, which up until now I didn't feel able to. The first two films were produced by [Mauritanian director] Abderrahmane Sissako's production company, but now I'm flying with my own wings – and with the idea that maybe if I met someone, in the way that Abderrahmane met me, I could produce them.

SG: Your short film *'Expectations'* hasn't had as much exposure as your features. There's a shocking moment

in it when the lead character cries – something you hardly ever see an African man do, in films or in life.

M-SH: Absolutely. That's exactly what I am trying to do in my films – to show transgressions, things that aren't usually found in life. Whereas there are a lot of filmmakers in Africa who seem to think cinema is purely to record the life and customs of people. What I'm trying to do is question the injustice that is part of society. I'm trying to push the limits of traditions that only have meaning because they are held in place by the elders who retain power, and who maintain that traditions have to be a certain way. These traditions aren't based on justice.

My entire cinema is based on the premise that it's not my traditions that make me African – it's because I have a certain education, a certain philosophy of life and a certain vision of things. I can lose my traditions and I will still be African. Africa has been enslaved, colonised and lost many of its traditions – and it is more alive than ever.

SG: How do you cast your films? Hardly any films are made in Chad, so how does one become an actor there?

M-SH: The work of an actor is about having a sensitivity and an intelligence. Youssouf Djaoro has an instinctive intelligence; he acts with an understanding of space, and he has a way with gesture – he even has a particular sensual walk. He carries something within him and he knows how to exploit it, which gives him his strength. I just give him some indications. He is really astonishing, because once he has read the script, he disappears for a week – you don't see him at all. But when he comes back he is someone else. He incarnates the role to such an extent that after *Daratt* he shaved his beard and people didn't recognise him. Even at [the FESPACO film festival in] Ouagadougou, where we are amongst Africans, people didn't recognise him. It is this capacity for metamorphosis – this capacity to transform himself – that is amazing with him.

The actress who plays the mother [Hadjé Fatimé N'Goua], who is a doctor in a pharmacy, has nothing to do with cinema. We started working together in [Haroun's 1999 docudrama] *Bye Bye Africa*. She knows how to be inspired by the women around her to give me what I am looking for. So those two are the main pillars on which the film hangs. Most of the other actors – including [the actress who plays] Madame Wong, Heling Li – I found in Paris.

SG: You're now working on a film about the case of the ship the *'Probo Koala'* that offloaded toxic waste in Ivory Coast.

M-SH: We are planning to film in Dakar at the end of the rainy season in August/September 2011. It's a political thriller called *African Fiasco*. That's another new challenge, working with well-known French actors, with another level of budget.

I like the idea of putting ourselves in danger from time to time. After having escaped the civil war after being shot at the age of 18, my whole life has been like a tightrope walker going forward without a tightrope. I always say nothing more can happen to me!

■ *'A Screaming Man'* is released on 13 May, and is reviewed on page 75. A retrospective of Haroun's films is at BFI Southbank, London from 13 to 30 May



Rachid Bouchareb's Algerian liberation drama 'Outside the Law' sparked fury in some quarters on its release in France. The director talks to **Ali Jaafar** about the enduring sensitivity of the war and why his film owes as much of a debt to crime drama as to politics

ALGERIA RISING

The crowds have massed in scenes of jubilation. Young men and women fill the streets, waving flags and crying with joy at their newly found liberation. These scenes of Algeria's independence day on 5 July 1962 make up the final moments of Rachid Bouchareb's *Outside the Law* (*Hors-la-loi*), the French-Algerian director's account of the Algerian struggle for independence after 132 years of French colonial rule. (Algeria was declared a French military colony in 1834, and later ruled to be an integral part of French territory in 1848 when the country was split into three French departments: Algiers, Oran and Constantine.) But if the denouement is so ecstatic, it is largely because the journey to get there has been so brutal.

The second part of a planned trilogy charting Algeria's long and often bloody relationship with France – 2006's *Days of Glory* paid tribute to the neglected sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of North African and "indigenous" enlistees from across France's former colonies who fought to free France and Europe from fascism during World War II – *Outside the Law* reunites Bouchareb with his three leading men, Sami Bouajila, Roschdy Zem and Jamel Debbouze.

Picking up where *Days of Glory* ended in 1945 – save for a short prologue set 20 years earlier – it follows three brothers who leave their native Algeria after their father's land is annexed by a local tribal chief working in collaboration with French occupying forces. Now living in an impoverished Parisian suburb with their mother, their lives start to diverge. Eldest son Abdelkader (Sami Bouajila) becomes a revolutionary, radicalised by

the massacre in the Algerian city of Sétif in 1945 when French soldiers killed hundreds of marchers supporting Algerian nationalism. The physically imposing Messaoud (Roschdy Zem) joins the French army to fight in the Indochina war, while Saïd (Jamel Debbouze) falls into a life of crime.

If *Days of Glory* was a huge critical and commercial success in France – notching up some 3 million admissions and persuading then-president Jacques Chirac to increase the pensions of 'indigenous' veterans to the level of their French counterparts – *Outside the Law* has fared less certainly. Though it repeated its predecessor's feat of being nominated for best foreign-language film at this year's Oscars, it has been beset by controversy.

The joyous scenes at the end of *Outside the Law* stand in marked contrast to the film's reception following its world premiere at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival. Hundreds of protestors, some from France's far-right National Front, gathered on the Croisette to decry the film for its portrayal of the Algerian war. Lionnel Luca – a member of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP party – condemned the film as "anti-French", while even venerable film industry trade publication *Variety* labelled it "all-out propaganda".

The hostility aimed at *Outside the Law*, before many of its detractors had seen the film, highlights France's complicated and still unresolved relationship with Algeria. "I was surprised that 50 years after the end of the Algerian war there would still be the same kind of violent reaction against the film that there had been for *The Battle of Algiers* [1966], which was banned in France for many years," says Bouchareb. "It became clear that the Algerian war was still not over in some people's

minds. There was pressure for the film not to be shown at Cannes and also not to be distributed in France. However, France is a land of freedom and the film was shown at Cannes, albeit with police protection, and it was distributed, even if in the south of France pressure was put on certain cinemas not to show it."

The comparison to Gilles Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* is an obvious one. To a certain extent the two films share the same subject matter, even if the majority of the action in Pontecorvo's film takes place in Algeria while Bouchareb concentrates on the Algerian campaign in Paris against French authorities. Both films explore the blurring of state and private terror tactics, and the moral obfuscation that ensues when one follows a strategy based on the belief that the ends justify the means. "Pontecorvo's film was the first time I discovered politics tackled like that in cinema," says Bouchareb. "It was the first film about the war in Algeria, the country of my parents. I could compare the images of the French army's repression of the Casbah with what I lived through in France during the Algerian war. My father was an active militant in the FLN. I remember the police raids on my parents' home. I had always





been interested in making a remake of the film to extend it for a new generation."

The two films are more telling, however, for their differences, particularly in their aesthetic choices. While Pontecorvo employed a *vérité* style in his seminal depiction of the struggle between the French army and Algerian revolutionaries, Bouchareb follows a deliberately elegiac, *film noir*-infused approach. The lavish production values – the film had an impressive £15 million budget – lend Bouchareb an expansive canvas on which to etch and elevate a set-up, which, structurally at least, could be seen as a classic tale of good guys versus villains. The subversive element here, though, is the prism through which Bouchareb regards events, as it is the Algerian militants – the characters who are "outside the law" – who occupy the position of heroes.

"I wanted to change the usual way of making films about liberation, of which there have been many," Bouchareb explains. "In the case of these types of wars, you always have on one side the revolutionaries or freedom fighters who are called bandits and criminals by the other side. I thought it would be interesting to show this clash by using a classic crime genre, with police and gangsters. That would get us away from the old stereotypes."

The use of the three brothers allows Bouchareb to establish an archetypal gangster film premise, as the personal struggles within the family mirror the initially splintered political dialectic of the Algerian struggle. Bouajila's Abdelkader is every inch the lean, ascetic revolutionary, his Malcolm X-style rimmed glasses visually signposting his militant credentials. His unrelenting belief in the revolution – even at the expense of his own family

BROTHERS IN ARMS

'*Outside the Law*', directed by Rachid Bouchareb (below), tells the story of three brothers, (above, from left) Abdelkader, Saïd and Messaoud, against a backdrop of the struggle for Algerian independence

– finds a perfect foil in Debbouze's small-time crook Saïd. More interested in exploiting the career of a promising young Algerian boxer he has discovered – whose gifted left hook is first revealed at the expense of a French policeman – than in the greater struggle for liberation, Saïd embodies the Algerian everyman immigrant, seeking upward mobility through cash not dogma. Between them is Zem's muscular, conflicted Messaoud, the revolution's enforcer who struggles to reconcile his responsibility for the growing body count with the higher goal of a free Algeria.

It is through this family's dynamic that Bouchareb explores the internecine debate that accompanied the Algerian revolution, as rival groups the hardline FLN (of which Abdelkader is a member) and the more moderate MNA battle each other as much as they do the French authorities for control of the hearts and minds of their compatriots. *Outside the Law* owes as much to genre staples such as John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) as it does to Pontecorvo's more political treatise.

"*The Godfather* was a big influence because I wanted to analyse the discipline of maintaining a revolution and also the aspect of family and community in the Paris suburbs during the war," says Bouchareb. "The film is partly about the management of a revolution and how you have to go to great lengths, further perhaps than you originally wanted, to commit violence to achieve your

ends. In that respect both Abdelkader and Messaoud are like Michael Corleone. Abdelkader has to go to extreme lengths to manage his enterprise. Of course, the criminal aspect is not the same but there is a parallel with regards to their management."

Bouchareb certainly doesn't shirk from showing the brutality of both sides. We witness Abdelkader and Messaoud dispatch fellow Algerians who have strayed from the revolutionary path just as we see Algerian civilians harassed, beaten and, in some cases, mowed down by French guns. Macbeth's lament that "I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er", becomes equally applicable to the characters in *Outside the Law*. "Where is our soul?" asks a beleaguered Messaoud at one point of Abdelkader. But his brother's silent response makes the answer clear. The killing must continue and the resistance must abide.

"I was very inspired by Melville's *Army of Shadows* [1969]," says Bouchareb. "I borrowed one of its scenes where members of the French resistance have to eliminate a fellow Frenchman. It's a harrowing scene that shows how revolution chews people up and spits them out. Repression is exactly the same. I wanted the film to have an epic quality. That freed my hands from a historical point of view. My film isn't a documentary. I make movies."

At times the film resembles a 1940s police procedural. Bouchareb recreates in minute details the funnelling of laundered money and weapons from North Africa and Europe to the Algerian rebels in Paris – often with the assistance of French sympathisers – while also tracing the creation of the



much-feared covert French organisation the Red Hand. Introduced in the 1950s by the French security forces, the Red Hand would carry out assassinations of leading Algerian dissidents – as well as European citizens assisting the revolution – across the continent. In the years leading up to independence, the Red Hand and FLN waged war against each other in a manner more reminiscent of an underworld feud than an organised military campaign. Torture, executions and car bombs litter Bouchareb's film as lofty political aspirations give way to *realpolitik* calculations.

The film has faced accusations, somewhat unfairly, of whitewashing both its Algerian protagonists and French characters. If anything, Bouchareb debunks the notion of heroes and villains to present a nuanced and utterly human examination of men caught up in circumstances beyond their control. While our focus stays largely on the three brothers – and their formidable nameless mother – arguably, the most intriguing character in the film is that of the French colonel Faivre. Played by Bernard Blancan (who memorably starred in *Days of Glory* as a hard-boiled French sergeant desperate to conceal his half-Algerian ancestry), Faivre is the fictionalised mastermind behind the Red Hand and French counter-insurgency against the Algerian struggle. Far from being a one-dimensional villain, he is presented as Abdelkader's mirror image, a proud patriot following orders and an unwavering belief in the rightness of his cause. Yet Bouchareb goes one step further than pure symbolism by having the two characters meet, briefly, in a bar. The scene – reminiscent of the Al Pacino-Robert De Niro encounter in Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) – becomes the ideo-

LAW AND DISORDER

Colonel Faivre (Bernard Blancan, centre) is a proud patriot with an unwavering belief in the rightness of his cause – even if it means extrajudicial murder

logical centrepiece of the film, a momentary respite from violence to lay out, articulately and dispassionately, the visions of both sides.

"There are parallels between these two characters. The colonel is a former member of the resistance against the Germans, just like Abdelkader, but now they are at odds," says Bouchareb. "I thought it would be interesting to have a face-to-face discussion not centred around criminality as you would have in a typical gangster film. They have a political discussion. Abdelkader tries to explain that just as the colonel fought for the liberty of his country, so too is he doing the same now for his. Abdelkader is a criminal in the colonel's eyes even though he is repeating the colonel's own path. Similarly, the colonel knows that Algeria will be free but in the meantime he has to do his job."

Faivre is granted the final dialogue in the film. "You've won," he whispers as he stands over the bloodied body of an Algerian shot by a French policeman during a demonstration and it is telling

Torture, executions and car bombs litter the film as lofty political aspirations give way to *realpolitik* considerations

that it is these scenes with Faivre, as much as the sequences of Algerians killing French policemen in Paris, which caused such an uproar in France. For while Bouchareb certainly gives time and respect to Faivre's point of view – and by extension that of the French authorities – during the Algerian war, the inherent rightness of the Algerians' struggle, for all the bloodshed which ensued, is placed beyond doubt and never questioned.

Even though *Outside the Law* ends specifically with archival footage of Algerians celebrating their independence, the film has gained an unexpected contemporary resonance for its UK release, against the backdrop of the so-called Arab Spring. Ever since young Tunisian market vendor Mohammed Bouazizi burnt himself to death in protest outside a government building in December last year, the Arab world has been convulsed by unprecedented scenes of mass mobilisation. In Tunisia and Egypt, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators succeeded in toppling decades of autocratic rule. Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria are all experiencing their own uprisings as this feature goes to print.

"Whenever a system tries to restrict people's freedom and repress them, there comes a time when those people will try to break free," says Bouchareb. "There comes a point when they no longer accept being second-class citizens anymore. They want their freedom back. What you see at the end of *Outside the Law* is the joy of people who have been liberated. This is the same thing we're seeing now elsewhere in the Arab world."

■ *'Outside the Law'* is released on 6 May and is reviewed on page 72



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T-SHIRTS AND OTHER APPAREL INSPIRED BY THE LOVE OF GREAT FILMS - MADE BY FILM LOVERS FOR FILM LOVERS.

The late British director and cinematographer Richard Leacock may be less well known than other Direct Cinema pioneers, but his innovations at the start of the 1960s defined the standards of documentary filmmaking for years to come. By **Brian Winston**

RICHARD LEACOCK: BEARING WITNESS

Two days after Direct Cinema pioneer Ricky Leacock died on 23 March, a meeting exploring new forms of interactive documentary was held in Bristol. i-Docs was billed as “the first lab/symposium to be dedicated to the rapidly evolving field of interactive documentary.” “In an era of pervasive computing, social media and a networked ‘information society’, digital documentary is embracing new forms,” its website proclaimed. “Web-docs, docu-games, photo-reportages, trans-media projects and locative narratives are developing new languages of factual communication that challenge the established linear narrative of documentary.”

Leacock, the senior figure responsible for the very documentary language implicitly now being swept aside, would nevertheless have loved this gathering. Well, he would have loved the technological ‘boys’ toys’ quality of the debate; of the content of the work displayed he would likely have been somewhat scathing. “‘New language’ about what, exactly?” one can imagine him asking. The platforms may well be different and the implications of participation profound; but at i-Docs the possibility that “linear narrative” might not be broke – and might not therefore need fixing – was not addressed. Moreover, the topics of these pioneering interactive texts – Palestine, prisons, poverty etc – seemed to stick as closely to the old agenda as the films you might find at any documentary film festival.

Although it was as much grounded in technological enthusiasms as the cutting-edge forms celebrated at i-Docs, Direct Cinema – Leacock’s ‘new language’ of the 1960s – had a greater instant claim to having expanded documentary’s horizons. The portable 16mm synch-sound system that Leacock played such a crucial role in developing, opened the way to a new level of observational intensity. And, just as had happened 40 years earlier with *Nanook of the North* – the 1922 film by Leacock’s mentor Robert Flaherty that is conventionally seen as the ‘first documentary’ – some in 1960 once again proclaimed the death of fictional cinema.

Of course, that never happened, and the claims Leacock and those around him then made for the observational purity of Direct Cinema were overstated. Overt intervention was certainly reduced to a minimum and reconstruction – now dismissed as ‘fakery’ – was no longer a *sine qua non*, but the result was less an unmediated representation of the ‘real’ than was claimed. Their very skills as filmmakers, especially in cutting their material to reveal the story, gave the lie to this. Leacock and associates such as D.A. Pennebaker and the Maysles brothers were never the mindless ‘flies on the wall’ their rhetoric suggested they were.

Leacock’s role in the movement he helped launch has been obscured over subsequent decades, for the simple reason that – although he continued to make films until the end of his long life – in 1968 he became a professor of film production at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, allowing others to seize the limelight. Nevertheless, he was the catalyst for the development of the modern documentary, liberating the camera from the tripod and abandoning the tyranny of the perfectly stable, perfectly lit shot – as well as the straitjacket of ‘voice of God’ commentary. Direct Cinema’s style of handheld, available-light and

long-take synch shooting, with no added effects, was to sweep aside all other documentary modes for a quarter of a century. To this day, such filming is what the public seems to think of as documentary, dismissing alternatives as unethical or inauthentic. Rows about ‘authenticity’ in documentaries still seem to turn on offences against Direct Cinema’s dogma – the set of rules Leacock was a prime mover in articulating.

Shooting wild

Richard (‘Ricky’) Leacock was born in London in 1921 and raised on a banana plantation in the Canaries – an exotic background that afforded him a privileged education at the progressive Dartington Hall School in Devon. He started making movies with his own 16mm camera at 14, influenced by exposure not only to Hollywood but also, at school, to the Soviet classics.

Leacock was at school with the daughters of Robert Flaherty, the ‘father of documentary’. When Flaherty visited his girls, Leacock showed him his first effort, and Flaherty was impressed enough to promise that they would work together one day. After school Leacock studied physics at Harvard before joining the US forces in 1942, becoming an army cinematographer. The circumstances of war convinced him that filming’s circumscribed norms, conditioned by studio practice, could largely be abandoned when the need arose.

After the war Leacock got in touch with Flaherty, who surprised him by making good his promise. Without seeing any of the young man’s wartime work, he hired Leacock as cinematographer on *Louisiana Story* (1948), an exquisitely photographed paean to the benefits of oil exploration – paid for by an oil company. Nominated for an Oscar, it was to be Flaherty’s last feature. Although Leacock’s admiration for Flaherty never dimmed, the experience of working on *Louisiana Story* showed him how frustrating documentary filming – especially synchronous sound shooting – then was. “We had to impose ourselves to such an extent upon everything that happened before



BEING THERE
After training with Robert Flaherty, opposite right, Leacock, centre, pioneered a handheld style on 1960s films such as *The Chair*; above



The experience of working for Robert Flaherty on 'Louisiana Story' showed Leacock how frustrating documentary filming then was

us, that everything sort of died," he observed.

In the 1950s Leacock enjoyed a successful career as a sponsored documentary filmmaker, and also began working as an independent for television, which was slowly opening up as a site for documentary exhibition. But, increasingly frustrated, he also started to explore new ways of shooting. Approached in 1954 to make the self-explanatory *Jazz Dance*, he decided to shoot in the way he had covered combat as a wartime cinematographer. Using a handheld 35mm Bell Howell Eyemo camera, he shot the film 'wild' – the silent footage subsequently edited to appear to be in synch with a separately recorded soundtrack.

The same year Leacock shot *Toby and the Tall Corn* – about the last rural tent-show in America – for the veteran documentary producer and director Willard van Dyke. Here he continued what he called his 'deprofessionalisation' by actually humping a heavy 35mm studio sound camera for two short handheld synch sequences. This was the film that brought Leacock to the attention of Robert Drew, a leading journalist at *Life* magazine. Time-Life's successful cinema newsreel *The March of Time* had not long survived the coming of television, and Drew was interested in exploring new forms of documentary that would reduce the role

of commentary by using illuminating moving images. In Leacock, he found the man who could provide those images.

Drew persuaded Time-Life to back some more experimental filming – and out of this came *Primary* (1960), the film that marked the birth of Direct Cinema in America. To shoot it, Leacock hand-held a 16mm version of a square studio synch camera, the Auricon, developed for the burgeoning TV news industry. It's a measure of the effectiveness of his innovation that the film looks so unexceptional today – a standard behind-the-scenes examination of an American political campaign, the primary race between John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey in Wisconsin – but at the time it was astounding. The film included sequences the like of which had never been seen before. Most famously, Leacock shot Kennedy pacing his hotel suite as he received the results of the primary – simply by leaving the switched-on Auricon resting on the arm of the chair he was sitting in. People in the film seemed to be oblivious to the camera; to use one of Leacock's favourite phrases, the event was more important than the filming.

Leacock, the physicist, went on to reduce the camera's obtrusiveness yet further. He took the

crystal from an electronic watch and used it as the control enabling the physically separate camera to run in synch with the quarter-inch audio tape recorder. Breaking the umbilical cord between Auricon and recorder significantly increased the flexibility of the system; indeed systems using the crystal control became industry norms for a quarter of a century, until portable handheld broadcast-standard video cameras began to replace 16mm film.

Evangelical spirit

In 1960, however, there was more at stake than technological advance – or even than a breakthrough to a new level of intimacy in documentary. Leacock and Drew were imbued with an evangelical spirit. Those who held to the old Flahertian faith were wrong and their works fraudulent; those who believed in the new gospel of non-interventionism were blessed and capable of delivering the grail of truth to their audiences. Leacock's mantra was that documentary should give the audience "the feeling of being there". The audience should be able to make up its own mind about what it was seeing, without direction imposed by a commentary.

Out of this came the Direct Cinema dogma: no tripods, no lights, no interviews, no commentary, no added sound. Of course, much of this was more honoured in the breach than the observance. For example, you weren't allowed to interview – but you could film interviewers interviewing. And cameras soon often had a single light attached. Yet so successful was this rhetoric that it became – and to some extent remains – the public benchmark for testing documentary authenticity.

As it turned out, increased flexibility in terms of shooting brought with it not just increased intimacy, but also increased ethical concerns surrounding the issue of invasion of privacy. Documentary's ethical difficulties – essentially the parallel problems of exposing the people being filmed and misrepresenting situations to audiences – were not after all merely a matter of old-fashioned techniques, and could not be solved simply by avoiding reconstruction and commentary. Nor was the need to edit in order to reveal meaning removed by the revolution in shooting technique. In fact it can be argued that Direct Cinema made matters worse. On the one hand, it exposed more of its subjects than traditional documentary ever had; on the other, it promised more 'truth' to its audiences.

Leacock himself compensated for these difficulties with something that too many of his peers lack – humanity, as seen in such films as his tightly focused study *The Chair* (1963), shot for Drew over a five-day period as a man condemned to the electric chair awaited news of his last appeal. Leacock's camera had a sympathy – even for the most outré characters – that never crossed the line into voyeurism. He was, above all, a great cinematographer, combining a mastery of the technology with the instinct that led him always to be in the right place, ready to capture those fleeting gestures that reveal character. His ambition for the documentary may have been overstated; film will never really give us "the feeling of being there" – but it can offer incontrovertible proof that Ricky Leacock, for more than half a century, *was* there, bearing witness. One hopes that the 'i-Docs' of the future can deliver as much.

Its hero is a goat – and that’s just the first thing that’s extraordinary about Italian director Michelangelo Frammartino’s utterly unclassifiable ‘*Le quattro volte*’. He talks to **Jonathan Romney** about charcoal, Calabrian folklore and the transmigration of souls

NATURE CALLS

There is no pitch, no synopsis that could remotely do justice to the hybrid originality of *Le quattro volte* (*The Four Times*). I first heard about Michelangelo Frammartino’s feature just before it screened in Cannes last year, from a British distributor who had caught it early. “It’s right up your street,” he told me, knowing my penchant for the unclassifiable. “The hero is a goat,” he went on, “and an ash pile... and a pile of logs.”

Naturally, I rushed to see it – partly because any film featuring goats is bound to be entertaining, partly because I remembered liking Frammartino’s idiosyncratic debut *Il dono* (*The Gift*) in 2004. But nothing prepared me for the brilliance of *Le quattro volte*, a film at once severe, poetic, beautiful, comic, philosophical, hugely complex and sublimely simple. It also contains the single finest extended sight gag I have seen since the heyday of Jacques Tati – and makes the best ever cinematic use of goats. Reviewing it in Cannes, I had no hesitation in declaring it a ‘maa-sterpiece’.

The film’s title could be translated as ‘the four turns’ or ‘four seasons’, but means something more like ‘four phases’ or ‘four realms’, following the theory of transmigration of souls associated with the school of Pythagoras. The sixth-century BC philosopher is closely associated with Calabria in southern Italy, and Frammartino’s film explores these Pythagorean ideas in the context of Calabrian rural life, around a hilltop village. (It was shot in three local towns, notably Caulonia, where the director’s own family is from.)

As Frammartino explains, “The film is based on the ideas of animism and reincarnation, and Calabria is very much an animist region. Pythagoras supposedly said that each of us holds within us four successive lives, each one enmeshed in the others. Man is made of mineral, because he has a skeleton; he’s a plant, because he has blood flowing through his veins like sap; he’s an animal, because he has mobility; and he’s also a rational being. So in order to fully understand himself, man has to understand himself four times.”

Le quattro volte wears its theory lightly, however. It asks us simply to watch and listen as its wordless succession of images creates the impression of a slender – but concrete – narrative. The film begins with workers tending a *scarazzo*, a large ash pile or oven-cum-pyre in which wood is transformed into

the charcoal used locally as fuel. They thump spades on the pile’s surface to drive air out, and the sound echoes through the nearby valleys. In the film’s remarkably complex sound design, the thumping comes to be equated with various human and animal heartbeats; but it could be interpreted as the heartbeat of the region, or of the earth itself.

Frammartino then introduces us to an elderly goatherd (Giuseppe Fuda) tending his animals in the hills. The old man has a cough, which he medicates by drinking water mixed with dust from the local church; the church cleaner sells it to him folded up in a torn page of a magazine. It’s a real tradition, Frammartino explains: “In the extreme desire that humans have to see something tangible, dust is the first thing you can see in the light – so in that tradition, it translates into that dust being a little particle of God. For Pythagoras, those dust particles were like souls floating in the atmosphere.”

One day, the goatherd loses his packet of dust – one of the film’s few overtly surreal images shows a woman staring out from the folded page, dropped on the ground, as ants teem round. He anxiously rushes to the church to get more; but whether it’s because he’s missed his daily placebo, or because he’s exposed himself to the night air, the next morning he’s not up with his herd. The results unfold in an extraordinary slow-burn gag, shot in an eight-minute single take from a camera looking down on the village. The scene begins with the arrival of the local *carbonai* (charcoal burners) in their truck, dressed as Roman centurions. It’s Easter, the day of the village’s traditional Passion parade. The participants gather on the hillside opposite the goat pen, where the goatherd’s agitated dog is barking at all comers. As the procession appears, the centurions chase the dog away, and the camera pans 180 degrees to follow both dog and humans downhill amid a fanfare of drums and trumpets. As the parade heads into the distance, the dog returns, the camera following it back to the hillside where it barks at a lone straggler, a scared choirboy. The boy distracts it by throwing stones, but the dog grabs the rock that serves as a brake for the truck, parked on a slope. After one more pan down and then up the hill, we get the catastrophic pay-off of this elaborately choreographed routine – signalled in advance by an offscreen crash and much panicked bleating.



ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL
In Frammartino’s exploration of reincarnation, the spirit passes from an elderly goatherd, above, to a goat, a fir tree and ultimately a charcoal pile





■ This deadpan, detached and altogether breath-taking *coup de cinéma* – which Frammartino originally sketched out by shooting it as an animation – is all the more remarkable when you consider all the factors involved: a superbly trained dog, a large crowd of non-professional actors with perfect timing, a dependence on gravity, and no doubt the presence of goat wranglers quickly hustling the herd into final position. “When we were shooting that sequence,” says Frammartino, “the producer was on the line from Rome non-stop – he was very worried about it not working out. He said, ‘You do have some fallback scenes if it doesn’t work out properly, don’t you?’ And I said, ‘Yes of course.’ But we all knew I didn’t.”

The sequence is a magnificent example of how Frammartino dramatises the conflict of natural anarchy and human attempts at control. We see it earlier in a scene of snails escaping from a pot. Nature tends to break its bounds, but that expansive energy makes great cinema. One shot takes us inside a crammed goat shed; as the goats rush out of the door as one, they leave the same space strikingly empty. Here and elsewhere, Frammartino exploits the liquid quality of the living mass – he’s painting with goats.

When the goatherd dies, the story – if we can call it that – enters its next phase, in a remarkable trick of editing. His coffin is placed in a funeral niche, then sealed in, the camera remaining in the darkness with it. We hear a steady thump. The distant sound of the *scarazzo*? The old man’s heartbeat? Or that of another living being? Frammartino cuts abruptly to the birth of a white goat, plopping out of the womb. The film’s next section follows this kid on what might, at the risk of anthropomorphism, be called its apprenticeship.

The newborn soon becomes socialised, staying in the pen with its peers while the adults go out to pasture. We see the young goats play a boisterous game of ‘king of the castle’ on top of an upturned sink – learning, as it were, the rudiments of goathood. But when the kid accompanies the herd into the hills, the film takes a poignant turn. Separated from the herd, it wanders off, seemingly following the distant thump from the ash pile. Frammartino tricks us into thinking we understand the goat’s feelings: a shot of waving treetops, apparently from the animal’s viewpoint, could be interpreted as the kid itself perceiving the trees as either benevolent or scary presences.

A towering fir tree provides sanctuary, and that’s where we leave the lost kid, lying among the tree’s roots. But is it sleeping or dead? Our sentimental tendency to anthropomorphise inevitably kicks in, but Frammartino is prompting us to examine our emotional response here. We may be desperate to know whether the kid survives (the film never tells us), but let’s face reality. After all, this is the country, where survival is hard – and in any case, these animals are fated to become meat, so why get soppy about a single goat? Still, cinema knows the art of stirring our feelings for non-human presences – it can even make us maudlin about a red balloon. Yet Frammartino doesn’t want us to experience those emotions without questioning them.

The kid is next replaced as ‘protagonist’ by the tree itself. As spring follows winter, the fir is cut down and – stripped of its bark – erected in a nearby town. There, festivities involve a climber perilously scaling its height, as seen in a brief sequence that brings to the fore the film’s function as ethnographic documentary. Then the focus changes again, and the tree is cut into logs (at least we assume it’s the same tree, as this happens off screen) to be incorporated into the *scarazzo*.

Here, Frammartino makes his most audacious play on the anthropomorphic fallacy. He shows us a number of pale logs lying on a darker pile: ‘novice’ logs awaiting their incorporation into the larger mass. Against all emotional logic, Frammartino has us – albeit perhaps unconsciously – identifying these blocks of wood as (implicitly sentient) ‘characters’ in the film, the latest narrative avatars of the man, the goat, the tree.

The film’s final extended sequence shows the meticulous construction of the *scarazzo*, a complex geometric structure. (Frammartino originally studied architecture, and regards it as an essential part of his training as a director.) The pile, roofed with fresh boughs, resembles a landscape-art installation by someone like Andy Goldsworthy, before being covered with straw, then ash. The film has come full circle; as at the start, smoke pours out of holes in the *scarazzo*’s surface.

The charcoal is soon ready, the *scarazzo* consuming itself as it converts its constituent matter into a new fuel; in that sense, it embodies the self-consuming, circular nature of Frammartino’s film, as it returns to its point of origin. A brief coda shows the charcoal delivered to the village; the final shot presents a vista of rooftops, seen repeatedly throughout the film, but this time with smoke issuing from a single chimney. It’s a sign that life goes on, but also that the residue of the consumed trees is returning to the atmosphere – where some of it will no doubt end up as dust in the church, medicine for the superstitious. (You might also detect a downbeat joke about the ceremonial smoke that signals papal elections.)

Wordless storytelling

Perhaps not surprisingly, there was never a written script for *Le quattro volte*, but a set of drawings. “I feel that if I draw, I don’t alter the idea I have in my head,” Frammartino explains. “Whereas if I try to write something down, I’m using a different part of my brain. So I draw, I take photographs, I make small animated sequences.” ➡

‘Those filmmakers who have attempted to approach things from a non-human viewpoint have released themselves from a cultural burden’

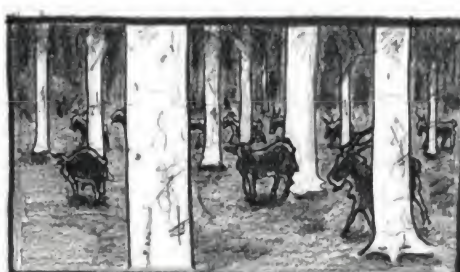


THE KID STAYS IN THE PICTURE

Frammartino, facing page, filmed in Calabria in southern Italy, where his family is from, drawing on the ideas of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who settled in the region in the sixth-century BC



Michelangelo Frammartino *Le quattro volte*



Not the least of Frammartino's achievements in *Le quattro volte* is to dispense almost entirely with human language (barring the occasional shout or muttered blessing). He previously experimented with wordless storytelling in *Il dono*, also filmed in Caulonia, the film was about an old man (played by the director's nonagenarian grandfather) and a young prostitute, brought together by two objects – a pornographic photo and a lost mobile phone.

In *Le quattro volte*, Frammartino goes further in reducing the centrality not just of language, but of human presence altogether. That's why the film – which, says Frammartino, took him two years to conceive and three to make, although he filmed it in 11 weeks – was shot by Andrea Locatelli in a style that reduces the primacy of the human. Take, for example, those rooftop shots, or the views of the village hillside, in which people, viewed from a distance, become comically puppet-like.

"I'm used to observing the world from my own height," says Frammartino. "But if I film from one metre off the ground, I'm taking a viewpoint which is no longer human but mechanical – the viewpoint of the camera. It's like trying to see the world through the eyes of someone who is not capable of making distinctions, of discriminating between things – who can't therefore establish hierarchies." For Frammartino, who made video installations before turning to film, "those filmmakers who have attempted to approach things from this non-human viewpoint have released themselves from a cultural burden – I'm thinking of Michael Snow or James Benning, or Beckett's *Film*".

Frammartino was also inspired by scientific theories of camouflage: "There are particular forms

DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT
Instead of writing a script for '*Le quattro volte*', which would have restricted his imagination, Frammartino produced a series of drawings

of camouflage in which certain animals take on features of a mineral – actually *become* mineral, like stonefish. They do this not to escape predators – because they don't actually have predators that seek them out visually. So scientists are suggesting that these animals are actually fusing with their surroundings. That's quite the opposite of the survival instinct, which leads you to separate from things. So this story about a man who becomes mineral, who discovers that he is made of the same material that surrounds him, is an invitation to the audience to make that same journey – to understand that between you and the film itself, there's really no separation."

You can take Frammartino's mineral philosophising with a pinch of salt – although the film's spirit is materialist rather than mystical, as the theme of transformation and fusion underwrites its whole conception. You might even see the theory of fusion at work in the hybrid nature of a film partaking at once of fiction and ethnographic documentary; *Le quattro volte* would sit nicely alongside, say, the Taviani brothers' *Padre padrone* (1977), Gideon Koppel's British landscape essay *sleep furiously* (2009) and the deadpan comedies of Tati and Otavio Iosseliani, not to mention György Pálfi's bizarre metaphysical slapstick *Hukkle* (2002).

Central to the film is Daniel Iribarren's richly textured sound design, fusing disparate materials, establishing the sense of continual metamorphosis. The thump of the ash pile becomes both a

heartbeat and a drum – we hear it in the tambours of the Easter procession. Then there are bells: the constant din of the goat bells, the bell carried by their guardian – as if he were a kind of human 'alpha goat' – and the church bells, summoning the human flock. And what are the parade trumpets, if not a human imitation of the primal bleat? We also get a wide range of wood sonorities, from the creak of boughs to the rustle of the charcoal at the end – crisp, glassy, representing the complete transmutation from vegetable to mineral.

Frammartino has said that he considers *Le quattro volte* "a political film, because it gives viewers choices". His film invites us to a more active viewing process than most, prompting us to shape for ourselves a multiple, uncontainable onscreen world. That conception of creative spectatorship is Frammartino's response to contemporary Italian image culture and a political regime that achieved power, he says, "by controlling images that were very seductive and very brutal – that prevented you from having any say in the whole equation".

You certainly get that 'whole equation' – a holistic equation, even – in *Le quattro volte*. But Frammartino's film is also political in the sense that it's an example of eminently green cinema. As well as offering a vision of natural equality in which goats and logs have equal narrative rights with man, it also proposes a theory of universal recycling, in which nothing is wasted – not even the dust.

■ Thanks to Consuelo Hackney for translation. '*Le quattro volte*' is released on 27 May, and is reviewed on page 73

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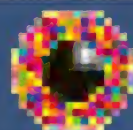
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.....
Attack the Block Films this cine-literate are rarely so unpretentiously enjoyable. It's easy to see why Joe Cornish's uproarish aliens-vs-hoodies feature debut brought the house down at the South by Southwest festival **p57**
.....

Unlucky for many

The prolific Japanese director Miike Takashi is never afraid to shock audiences. But the shock with '13 Assassins' is that he has delivered a classical samurai movie worthy of Kurosawa. By **Christoph Huber**

13 Assassins

Miike Takashi, 2010

Something funny happened at last year's Venice Film Festival. After the world premiere of *13 Assassins* (*Jûsan-nin no shikaku*) in competition, critics hitherto hostile to the work of the prolific Japanese director Miike Takashi suddenly started to rave about the Kurosawa-like classicism of his new sword-fighting spectacular. At the same time, many of the director's long-time admirers complained that – for all its technical virtuosity – it lacked the personal touch. Had the *enfant terrible* of Japanese cinema sold out on reaching his 50th birthday?

In fact, if anything, Miike's recent films seem every bit as extravagant as the breathless preceding career (more than 80 works in 20 years) that has established him as one of the most original Asian auteurs. Not only did Venice also host the near-simultaneous premiere of Miike's typically idiosyncratic and enjoyably surreal superhero sequel *Zabranen: Attack on Zebra City*, but as a voluptuous death dirge *13 Assassins* hardly seems the stuff of international blockbuster security, no matter how amazing Miike's handling of action – and the final battle, an impressively mounted presentation of criss-crossing strategic movements escalating into mayhem, vies for instant classic status. Lasting 45 minutes, it gives viewers the sense of witnessing chaotic bloodshed in real time, but the *mise en scène* is so purposeful that we never lose our bearings. Miike's magisterial craftsmanship is beyond doubt as he sets up another complex study of violence and its implications.

A remake of a 1963 film by the neglected master Kudô Eiichi, *13 Assassins* is on the face of it a traditional story of a group of obsolete samurai going out with a bang, as swordsman Shinzaemon Shimada (Yakusho Kôji) assembles a team of assassins to take out the murderous, sadistic – and thus potentially politically dangerous – Lord Naritsugu (Inagaki Goro).



'13 Assassins' does seem more audience-friendly than is customary for this director. For one thing, it's undeniably action-driven

Unlike, say, Miike's subversive 2002 update of Fukasaku Kinji's yakuza classic *Jingi no hakaba* (*Graveyard of Honour*, 1975), this is a remake that sticks closely to the original.

Kudô's film was the first in his terrific 1960s trilogy of black-and-white *jidaigeki* (period dramas) that used the guise of a historical setting to address Japan's contemporary political conflict, presenting poor and marginalised samurai battling corrupt authorities as equivalent to the rebellious 60s student movement. Removed from that political context, Miike's film – for all its fidelity – comes across as a classical genre exercise. The new *13 Assassins* even starts the same way as the earlier version – the ritual suicide of a retainer that sets

the plot in motion is a crisp, confrontational set piece that also establishes Miike's dark, cool yet velvety digital palette. But by the end his film feels, if anything, more old-school than Kudô's flight of madness.

Much has been made of the absence of 'Miikesque' moments – those idiosyncratic, sometimes shocking bits cherished by many of his fans. Unlike Kudô, however, Miike actually *shows* a horribly mutilated woman after her fate at the hands of the villainous Lord Naritsugu has been recounted. (For an even more impressive follow-up, the mute victim mouth-paints her cry for revenge on a piece of paper: the subtitles render the characters

as "TOTAL MASSACRE".) There's also a characteristic ominous/funny scene when the evil lord's guards (wrongly) conclude it's safe to enter a booby-trapped town at the sight of a little boy urinating in the square – not to mention the herd of burning cattle used in the most bizarre sleight of hand during the battle. Reportedly, more *outré* touches make up most of the extra 20 minutes of the extended cut shown in Japan – although there aren't any gaps noticeable in the international-release version (the one that premiered in Venice).

Despite these typical touches, *13 Assassins* does seem considerably more audience-friendly than is customary for this director. For one thing, it's undeniably action-driven; the team come across less as individuals than as one strategic unit, in keeping with Miike's own decision to make strategy the focus of his *mise en scène*. The first half of the film is devoted to establishing the situation and laying out the battle plan: to stand a chance against overwhelming odds, the assassins decide to stage an ambush in a village, where carefully prepared surprise traps and spatial advantages (rooftops, narrow passages) will compensate for their numerical inferiority. The second half presents the bloody results, punctuated by cheerful battle cries such as: "Only 130 more men to go!"

Unlike the heroes of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), who are differentiated and humanised by their backstories, Miike's samurai are afforded little room for individuality within their quickly sketched outlines. Only the hunter from the mountains who joins the team along the way (bringing their number to 13) stands out vividly as designated comic relief – a child of nature who repeatedly mocks the solemn devotion of the warriors and their code: "Your samurai brawls are crazy fun!" Former model Iseya Yûsuke acquits himself well in the part, while pop star Inagaki Goro oozes nefarious charisma as the handsome yet hideous villain Naritsugu.

Those are the meatiest roles, but Yakusho Kôji makes a stalwart protagonist as Shinzaemon, supplying this traditional heroic





TO THE DEATH
Shinzaemon Shimada (Yakusho Kôji, above) leads his band of samurai on a mission to assassinate the evil Lord Naritsugu (Inagaki Goro, below left), against overwhelming odds

figure with touches of dark wit and fury. And it's his character's confrontation with old rival Hanbei (Ichimura Masachika) – once his sparring partner at the dojo, now the lieutenant of the evil lord – that provides the film with its emotional centrepiece. Even as Hanbei disapproves of his master's ways, his sense of duty as a samurai makes him stay loyal to the bitter end, only to be posthumously humiliated by Lord Naritsugu's characteristically impious treatment of his severed head. It's a sarcastic punchline to one of the thematic questions that fuels the film: sure, the villain is marked by his utter disrespect for human life, but is there really such a big difference in principle between his (admittedly perverted) yearning for an age of war he never experienced and the samurai's determination to die nobly according to that age's adages – for what exactly?

Shinzaemon and Hanbei are brothers in spirit who find themselves on opposing sides, their meetings and inevitable face-off conveying a classical pathos

which serves to remind us that, while Miike has long been misunderstood as a purveyor of 'Asia Extreme' provocations, he is actually one of the great humanists of contemporary cinema. Ever since the inception of the Miike cult in the West in 1999, the year that saw the release of his subversive melodrama of cruelty *Audition* (*Odishon*) and his yakuza film *Dead or Alive* (*Hanzaisha*), he's been marketed mainly in terms of coolness, focusing on virtuoso violent spectacle, exotic weirdo humour and stylistic inventiveness.

This accounts for the frequent neglect of the spiritual aspects of his work (for example, the intimations of Buddhist hell in *Dead or Alive*), or of films in different keys (such as 2002's *Shangri-La*, a sweet outsider tale of casualties of capitalism that's a straightforward example of upbeat humanism; or 2005's wonderful remake *The Great Yokai War*, a child-friendly fantasy and one of the great widescreen films of the last decade).

Within the classical construction of *13 Assassins*, the ambivalence and complexity of Miike's treatment of violence can be seen more clearly; despite the formal originality and versatility we expect from him, this film is more familiar and traditional in terms of its emotional

impact. Of course, you could argue that Miike more than anyone has earned the right to do *chambara* (the swashbuckler genre) straight – he is, after all, also the man who made *Izo* (2004), the film that turned the samurai genre inside

out for good. But like other Miike masterpieces, including its criminally under-seen counterpart *God's Puzzle* (2008), *Izo* managed to conjure a unique mood all its own – a true essence of the 'Miikesque'.

For credits and synopsis, see page 79

Revenge and violence

Miike Takashi on the appeal of remaking '13 Assassins'

With any film I make, I never see similar films for reference. The most important thing about remaking a classic movie is how much you respect the original. I didn't worry about putting my own mark on the remake, since I respected the original film. I have never sought to impose my personality on a film – my philosophy as a director has always been to set aside my ego and just enjoy making the film.

There is no historical evidence of the legendary battle in '13 Assassins'. But I do believe it's true that samurai did not fear risking their lives, and fought against their enemies regardless of how many they were. The pleasure of making a 'jidaigeki' [period drama] film is that the characters can achieve in only one night what would take 100 days in a contemporary story. I always seek universal themes when making a 'jidaigeki' film. Love begets revenge and justice begets violence.



MIIKE TAKASHI

I usually work with the same CGI team. I do give very detailed instructions, but the team understands my basic taste even if I don't elaborate. With CGI, I don't create things that are not possible in reality. I only create real things that just look better when created with CGI. But I love the act of shooting and I'm always seeking something in which I can get absorbed – it's like an addiction. I think it's about time to go wild once again!

Age of Heroes

United Kingdom/
India/Norway 2011
Director: Adrian Vitoria
Certificate 15 89m 48s

The wartime contribution of future 007 creator Ian Fleming in shaping Naval Intelligence's 30 Assault Unit – which aimed to pilfer strategic enemy information through covert commando-style operations – certainly represents intriguing subject-matter (and featured in two fairly undistinguished TV movies, *Goldeneye* and *Spymaker*, in 1989-90). Unfortunately, modest WWII action offering *Age of Heroes* doesn't proceed very far with this particular angle beyond a smattering of scenes with posh James D'Arcy's Fleming supervising a daring raid on a Nazi radar research station in deepest Norway. Instead, we have to make do with a decidedly nondescript men-on-a-mission affair, hampered by sketchy characterisation, anodyne action highlights and constrained production resources evidently stretched to the limit. Perhaps the idea is to attract UK viewers who enjoyed Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* and are amenable to the presence of homegrown ladsploitation stalwarts Danny Dyer and Sean Bean in a WWII context – but the result delivers disappointingly little for anyone's money.

Ever-reliable Bean, needless to say, looks right at home in combat fatigues, barking out orders and lobbing grenades, but sadly director Adrian Vitoria and his co-writer Ed Scates fail to give him much in the way of character development beyond worrying about the family at home and delivering hard-but-fair advice to initially undisciplined Dyer. The latter's role, on the other hand, seems clearly conceived as a point of connection between today's youth and the travails of the wartime generation, since his progress from bolshie corporal to committed team player presents a potentially worthwhile rite-of-passage thread which again goes for very little given the lack of focus in the writing.

Elsewhere, William Houston does well to catch the eye in the standard role of the no-nonsense Scottish sergeant



Bean there, done that: Sean Bean

who puts the men through their paces in training and follows through on the mission, while the otherwise perfunctory Norwegian end of the operation brings an all too brief frisson of ambiguity as the crew wonder whether their field contact Izabella Miko is actually a plant working for the enemy.

While it's easy to criticise the script for a lack of invention, it must have been difficult coming up with a viable wartime adventure when there clearly wasn't much money available for spectacle. This is evident from the very first scenes, as the chaotic BEF fallback towards Dunkirk is depicted largely via offscreen sound effects; although the odd glimpse of unimpressive CGI renders the skies above Blitz-era London, the climactic assault involves a gun battle around a series of fairly mundane outposts posing as a Nazi radar station and a final set-to in and around a farmhouse – all of which apparently prioritises getting as much mileage as possible out of seemingly inexpensive locations.

SYNOPSIS Dunkirk, 1940. Corporal Rains retreats under heavy fire from the German advance and finds himself on disciplinary charges after striking an officious superior. Meanwhile, at Naval Intelligence, Captain Jones reports to Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming, who has an assignment for him – a raid on a German radar research station in Norway to steal its secrets.

Fleming orders Jones to assemble a crack team of commandos, though one of his chosen crew, Brightling, is currently in military prison along with Rains. The latter joins the team on approval after holding Jones at gunpoint when he visits. A gruelling training regime begins in the Scottish Highlands under the supervision of Sergeant 'Mac' Mackenzie.

The RAF drop the commandos, joined by intelligence boffin Rollright, in the Norwegian tundra, where they rendezvous with resistance fighter 'Beowulf' – who turns out to be a young woman, Jensen. Her presence initially arouses suspicion but she proves her mettle as Nazi forces begin shooting local villagers to extract information about the visitors. The commandos successfully raid the research station. Unable to make it to their assigned pick-up point, they track back on foot, walking into a deadly firefight at a deserted farm. Jones and Mac are last seen firing grenades at the Nazis surrounding them, while Rollright talks fearful Rains out of cutting his own throat; with Jensen they make for Sweden on the other side of the valley.

Amreeka

Canada/Kuwait/Egypt/
United Arab Emirates/USA 2009
Director: Cherien Dabis

Born in Nebraska to a Palestinian father and Jordanian mother, Cherien Dabis has worked on several American TV shows (*The D Word*, *The L Word*) and on short films set either in the US (*Memoirs of an Evil Stepmother*, 2004) or in Palestine (the award-winning *Make a Wish*, 2006). For her feature debut *Amreeka* (the Arabic word for America), Dabis has found a way to bring together these different aspects of her identity. If this bilingual, bicultural production is split into Palestinian and American sections, that only reflects a broader thematic preoccupation with divisions and borders, both abroad and at home.

Living in the West Bank during the Second Intifada, Muna (played with winning warmth by Nisreen Faour) must negotiate all the indignities and impediments of occupation just to get from work to home every day – yet when she and her teenage son Fadi emigrate to America shortly after the US invasion of Iraq they find all their problems following them, and are welcomed by US Customs with a lengthy and humiliating search. Despite her degrees and years of banking experience, Muna faces prejudice and rejection as she looks for work, eventually taking a low-end job at a White Castle hamburger joint. Fadi, too, finds the conflicts of the Middle East replaying themselves in the corridors of his new high school. Meanwhile, despite having settled in Illinois 15 years earlier, Muna's sister-in-law Raghdha and her doctor husband Nabeel start receiving anti-Arab hate mail; as Nabeel is rapidly abandoned by his 'patriot' patients, they struggle for the first time to meet the mortgage payments on their middle-class home.

Though certainly politically engaged, Dabis's film is equally interested in divisions of a more domestic variety. It isn't clear what upsets Muna more about life in the West Bank: having to negotiate multiple Israeli checkpoints or being forced to share territory with her hated ex-husband and his new bride. In the US, Raghdha and Nabeel's home isn't beleaguered only from without, but also becomes its own zone of apartheid from within, with Nabeel exiled to the basement after an argument, Muna and Raghdha increasingly alienated from their Americanised offspring, and one of Raghdha's daughters erecting her own separation barrier to demarcate her side of the bedroom from her sister's.

"Every place sucks," Muna tells Fadi. "The important thing is that you can't let anyone make you question who you are." Accordingly, this migrants' tale, pitching itself somewhere between *The Visitor* (2007) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), shows both the exclusion of, and solidarity between, its many outsider characters – not just Muna and her extended family but also Fadi's headmaster Stan Novatski ("Not many Polish Jews around here") and Muna's

Even then, the direction isn't always up to the task of tracking the character locations and keeping us abreast of the casualty list, to the extent that it remains unclear whether Bean actually makes it out alive or not. A set-up for a sequel? The pulse resolutely fails to quicken at the prospect.

♦♦ Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Produced by
Lex Lutzus
Nick O'Hagan
James Youngs
James Brown
Screenplay
Ed Scates
Adrian Vitoria
Cinematographer
Mark Hamilton
Editor
Chris Gill
Production Designer
Richard Crampling
Music
Michael Plowman
Production Sound Mixer
Keith Tunney
Costume Designer
Elvis Davis
Stunt Co-ordinator
Kai Kolstad Rodseth

CAST

Sean Bean
Major Jack 'Davey' Jones
Danny Dyer
Corporal Rains
Aksel Hennie
Steinar
Izabella Miko
Jensen
James D'Arcy
Ian Fleming
William Houston
Mac
John Dagleish
Rollright
Stephen Walters
Brightling
Guy Burnet
Riley
Ewan Ross
Gable
Christian Ruback
model

Jan Erik Madsen
Teichman

©Age of Heroes Films Ltd.
Production Companies
Panaramic LLP in association with Atlantic Swiss Productions and Magna Films, Prime Focus & Moskus Film in association with Matador Pictures, Cinema Five and Regent Capital, ContentFilm International and Metrodome present a Neon Park & Giant Films production. Made with the support of the NFI, Kent Film Fund and Filmkraft
Executive Producers
Nigel Thomas
Charlotte Walls
Peter Unie
Christopher Figg
Robert Whitehouse
Jamie Carmichael
Shail Shah
Simon Goldberg
James Greenstade

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

8,082 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS West Bank, 2003. Bank clerk Muna Farah is tired of facing daily humiliation at Israeli checkpoints, and sick of running into her ex-husband and his younger new wife. Worried that there is little future for her teenage son Fadi, she decides, having just obtained a Green Card, to emigrate to America.

On their arrival, mother and son are questioned for three hours by US customs. They finally reach the Illinois home of Muna's sister Raghda and her family, only to realise that they have left all their savings behind. In the anti-Arab climate surrounding the recent invasion of Iraq, Raghda's doctor husband Nabeel is losing patients, and death-threats received through the mail create frictions within the family. The only job Muna can get is serving at a burger bar, though she tells everyone that she's working for a bank. Gradually she befriends her young co-worker Matt, and also Fadi's sympathetic new headmaster Stan Novatski.

Fadi is initiated into American teen culture by his cousin Salma, and finds himself clashing with fellow pupil Mike, whose brother is serving in Iraq. This clash leads to Muna herself being injured in the workplace, and the family find out where she is really employed. When Fadi retaliates against Mike and is detained by the police, Stan intervenes on his behalf.

The family, joined by Stan, go out for a feast in an Arabic restaurant.

blue-haired White Castle co-worker Matt. The ending, in which Muna and her relatives all sit down together with Stan to an Arabic feast, may seem a little pat in its promise of a better future, but Dabis has carefully laid the groundwork to suggest that even if this momentarily happy family can get through the inflammatory politics of 2003, they are likely to come a cropper once again later in the decade when their high dependence on credit comes home to roost. ➡ **Anton Bitel**

CREDITS

Produced by
Christina Piovesan
Producer
Paul Barkin
Written by
Cherien Dabis
Director of Photography
Tobias Dattum
Editor
Keith Reamer
Production Designer
Aidan Leroux
Music
Kareem Roustom
Sound Mixer
Brock Capell
Costume Designer
Patricia Henderson

CAST

Nisreen Faour
Muna Farah
Hiam Abbass
Raghda Halaby
Alia Shawkat
Salma Halaby

Melkar Muallem
Fadi Farah
Yussuf Abu Warda
Nabeel Halaby
Joseph Ziegler
Mr Novatski
Amer Hlehel
Samir
Selena Haddad
Lamis Halaby
Jenna Kavar
Rana Halaby
Suheila Muallem
Jamileh
Brodie Sanderson
Matt
Andrew Sannie
James
Daniel Boiteau
Mike

©Amreeka
Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Maximum Film
International in
association with
Levantine

Entertainment presents
a film by Cherien Dabis
A First Generation Films
production
An Alcina Pictures/
Buffalo Gal Pictures/
EVMG production in
association with Rotana
Studios and Showtime
Arabia
In association with
Levantine
Entertainment, Rotana
Studios, Showtime
Arabia
Produced with the
participation of The
Violet Jabara
Foundation (Linda K.
Jacobs), R.A. Abdoo &
Co., LLC, Manitoba Film
& Music
Produced with the
assistance of The
Government of
Manitoba – Manitoba
Film and Video
Production Tax Credit,
the Canadian Film or
Video Production Tax
Credit, Ontario Media
Development
Corporation Film and
Television Tax Credits
A selected project of
Tribeca All Access & The
Media Arts Fellowships,
a program of the Tribeca
Film Institute, founded
and supported by the
Rockefeller Foundation
Developed with the
assistance of RAWI –
Middle East
Screenwriters' Lab, a
project of The Royal Film
Commission (Jordan) in

consultation with the
Sundance Institute
Developed with the
assistance of the
Sundance Institute
Feature Film Program
Developed with the help
of the Film Independent
Filmmaker Labs
Developed with the
support of the Dubai
International Film
Festival
Developed in
association with the
Independent Television
Service (ITVS) with
funding provided by the
Corporation for Public
Broadcasting
With the support of the
Berlin Talent Project
Market
Executive Producers
Alcina Sams
Cherien Dabis
Gregory Keverer

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Dogwoof Pictures



Made in Milan: Nicola Acunzo, Filippo Timi

Angels of Evil

Italy/France/USA 2010
Director: Michele Placido
Certificate 15 128m 9s

The fame of celebrity criminals seldom extends much beyond their own countries – it's unlikely that the name of Ronnie Biggs carries much weight outside the UK, and few people beyond the borders of France would have known of Jacques Mesrine until Jean-François Richet's 2008 two-part feature. So Michele Placido's biopic will probably be the first most non-Italians will have heard of Renato Vallanzasca, one-time kingpin of the Milanese underworld and today, aged 60, still a figure of controversy, jailed for life but allowed out on day release. In his heyday in the 1970s he was famed for his good looks, glamorous lifestyle, audacious heists and alleged 'moral' attitude to crime, claiming he never killed anyone except cops.

Exceptionally, this is an Italian crime movie that doesn't involve the Mafia (though there's a brief mention of the Camorra when Vallanzasca and his former rival Turatello meet in jail in Rome and form an alliance). In fact, despite its 30-year span and a helpfully provided international timeline in the production notes ("1974 – Brigitte Bardot retires... 1977 – Elvis Presley dies") there's a strangely hermetic feel to the action. Although the film's main focus is the 1970s, we are given no hint that these were Italy's *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), the era of Andreotti, the Red Brigade, the killing of ex-PM Aldo Moro and the Second Mafia War. Everything is narrowed down to the exploits of Vallanzasca, his associates and rivals, a tight little group on which events in the outer world seem scarcely to impinge.

The multi-authored script is loosely based on Vallanzasca's 1999 autobiography *The Flower of Evil*, which may be why it seems set on packing in

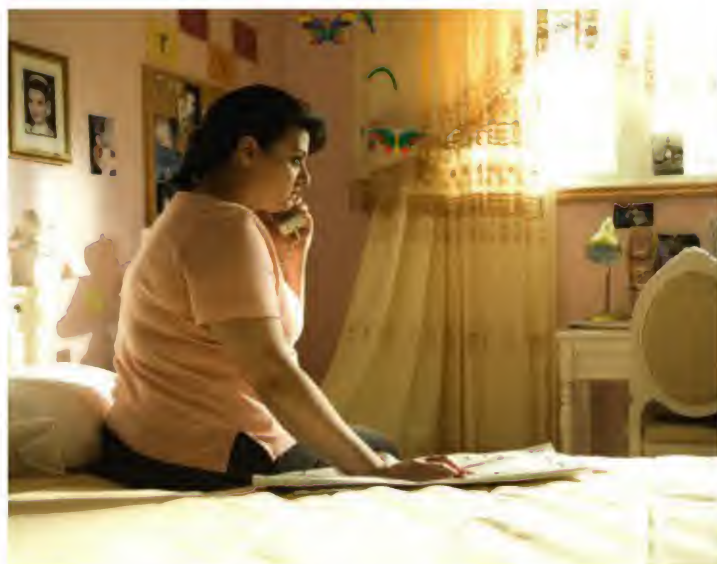
as much detail as possible, as if to convince us of its authenticity. As interchangeable gang members come and go, as jail succeeds jail and escape follows escape, all narrative tension gradually drains from the film, replaced by a sense of thudding predictability. Placido has been here, or hereabouts, before: his 2006 *Romanzo criminale* likewise followed the fortunes of a real-life upstart criminal band taking over the city's underworld, only there the city was Rome and the criminals were the Magliana gang. In that film he provided far more of Italy's political context but it too eventually sagged under the dead weight of its sequential narrative structure.

The saving grace of *Romanzo criminale* was the performance of its lead actor, Kim Rossi Stuart, and so it is here. Rossi Stuart (who also co-scripted) endows Vallanzasca with a louche swagger that makes his iconic status as *il bel René* and his following of female groupies wholly credible. And in the end *Angels of Evil* seems to succumb to its protagonist's self-mythologising charm, taking a largely uncritical view of his criminal career and giving him the last word: "I'm not a bad person," he tells us, "I just have a very pronounced dark side." After which, with a disarming smile, he surrenders to a young rookie cop – *il bel René* to the last. ➡ **Philip Kemp**

CREDITS

Produced by
Elide Melli
Fabio Conversi
Screenplay
Kim Rossi Stuart
Michele Placido
Antonio Leotti
Toni Trupia
Andrea Leanza
In collaboration with:
Antonella D'Agostino
Story
Andrea Purgatori
Angelo Pasquini
Based on the books
Il fiore del male [The
Flower of Evil] by
Carlo Bonini, Renato
Vallanzasca, and
Lettera a Renato by

Renato Vallanzasca,
Antonella D'Agostino
Director of Photography
Arnaldo Catinani
Editor
Consuelo Catucci
Art Director
Tonino Zera
Original Music by/ Music Performed by
Negramaro
Sound Recordists
Gaetano Carito
Antonio Barba
Costume Designer
Roberto Chiochi



Another brick in the wall: Nisreen Faour

CAST

Kim Rossi Stuart
Renato Vallanzasca
Filippo Timi
Enzo
Valeria Solarino
Consuelo
Moritz Bleibtreu
Sergio
Paz Vega
Antonella D'Agostino
Francesco Scianna
Francis Turatello
Lino Guanciale
Nunzio
Gaetano Bruno
Fausto, 'Faustino'
Paolo Mazzarelli
Beppe
Nicola Acunzo
Rosario
Stefano Chiodaroli
Armando

©[no company given]
Production
Companies
Cosmo Production
presents a Cosmo

Production, 21st
Century Fox Italia, Babe
Films production in
collaboration with Fox
International
Productions
With the participation of
Canal+
A film by Michele
Placido

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

11,533 ft +8 frames

Italian theatrical title
**Vallanzasca Gli angeli
del male**

Armadillo

Denmark/Norway/Sweden/
Netherlands/United Kingdom/
Finland/Germany/Canada 2010

Director: Janus Metz

Certificate 15 105m 18s

As they'd say on Twitter, Danish film and television production is currently 'trending'. Crime drama *The Killing* was the sleeper hit of BBC4's winter programming, and Susanne Bier's *In a Better World* won this year's Oscar for best foreign language film. The latest addition is *Armadillo*, a powerful documentary about a group of Danish soldiers fighting in Helmand province in Afghanistan, and winner of the Grand Prix de la Semaine de la Critique at last year's Cannes festival.

It isn't hard to see why the film's searching *vérité*-style reportage impressed the judges. The commitment of director Janus Metz and cameraman Lars Skree is considerable, perhaps even foolhardy. They venture out on patrol alongside the troops – at one point the camera records bullets hitting the ground at their feet – and they are unflinching in their depiction of scenarios that might reflect badly on their subjects, including a wild party with a stripper and a debriefing in which the word 'liquidate' is used to describe the killing of a group of Taliban soldiers. (Indeed, this event, and the film's studiously neutral take on it, have proved controversial in the Danish media.) Metz also seems to have that element of luck required to make a great documentary: not only does he record the controversial killings and their aftermath but also an impassioned and eloquent speech by the men's patrol leader imploring people back home to try to understand the difficult choices his men face on the battlefield.

The film is replete with a predilection for heavily mannered cinematography. Soft focus, canted camera angles and slow motion combine to show war as psychogenic experience, and even in the bright sunshine of Helmand province the colour palette is dominated by black. Alongside this heavy stylisation, the film also courts the conventions of the war-movie genre: the Philip Glass-style score strikes an elegiac tone, a playful swimming scene marks the journey from innocence to experience, and a traumatised vet takes a shower in the film's closing sequence. A shot of helicopter gunships complete with distorted sound design is an obvious lift from *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and a long, searching close-up of an injured soldier calls to mind Don McCullin's iconic photograph 'Shell-shocked US Marine, Hue, Vietnam, February 1968'.

At times these elements seem in danger of compromising the film's claims to the real but they are more than simply empty quotation. Indeed, Metz's organising principle here might well be found in the edit that shows a soldier tossing a grenade in a computer game, the arc continuing in documentary footage of a battle and culminating in a real explosion. For these young men at war, *Armadillo*



Great Danes: 'Armadillo'

seems to claim, the realms of entertainment and the real are so thoroughly entangled as to shape and reinforce one another. In fact, the film suggests that war, for soldier and for cinemagoer alike, is always already mediated.

Armadillo is a companion piece to *Restrepo*, Sebastian Junger and Tim Hetherington's recent Afghan War documentary. Both films are tough, unflinching and successful, but if there is a distinction to be made it is in Metz's greater critical distance from his subjects, his willingness to reveal more fully a military ethos founded on bullying, violent computer games and pornography. The Danish troops in *Armadillo* are less noble, less

damaged, less naive and less likeable than their US counterparts in *Restrepo*. This greater critical distance extends to the final sequence of the film in which we are informed that most of the men have pledged to return to Afghanistan. It is to Metz's credit that we are left to decide for ourselves whether this is a marker of the soldiers' brave commitment to see things through or rather a pathological need to return to the scene of the crime.

♦♦ Guy Westwell

CREDITS

Producers
Ronnie Fridthjof
Sara Stockmann
Cinematographer
Lars Skree
Editor
Per K. Kirkegaard
Music Composer
Uno Helmersson
Dramaturgical Adviser
Rasmus Heisterberg
Sound Design
Rasmus Winther
Commissioner Joakim Strand, Auto Images (Lennart Ström) and VPRO (Barbara Truyen) In association with More4 (Tabitha Jackson), NRK (Tore Tomter), YLE Co-productions (Ilkka Vehkalahti), ZDF/Arte, SVT (Axel Arne), TVO & Knowledge Network A film by Janus Metz Produced by Fridthjof Film Production, DR – Danish Broadcasting Corporation International Sales (Kim Christiansen) Co-producer: Auto Images

WITH

Mads Mini
Daniel Olby
Rasmus Munke
Kim Birkerød

©Fridthjof Film
Production
Companies
Fridthjof Film presents Supported by The Danish Film Institute (Film Commissioner Michael Haslund-Christensen), Nordisk Film & TV Fond (Film Consultant Karolina Lidin), The Swedish Film Institute (Film Commissioner Suzanne Glansborg) Financed in collaboration with TV2 Denmark A/S (Editor Sune Roland) In co-production with Film i Skåne (Film

Dolby Digital
In Colour

Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

9,477 ft +0 frames

Arthur

USA 2011

Director: Jason Winer

Certificate 12A 109m 49s

Two generations of middlebrow overlap in this remake of Steve Gordon's 1981 romantic comedy, now principally remembered for its karaoke-friendly Christopher Cross theme song.

This time around DJ Mark Ronson and Ben Gibbard provide the fresh pop for young professionals, and pop-comic Russell Brand stars. The reasons for an *Arthur* revival aren't difficult to figure: Anglo-American comedy is enjoying a long Indian summer of films with extended adolescence as their subject, and Arthur Bach, with his bottomless disposable income, makes the perfect "dazzling floorshow" of misbehaviour – one of Gatsby's "careless people", played for laughs.

Appropriately, much of the romance in little-boy-lost *Arthur* is conducted through bonding over shared childhood memories: *Frog and Toad* easy-readers and *Looney Tunes*. Love-interest Naomi – who's writing a children's book – is played by Greta Gerwig, an 'indie darling' in mid-crossover, doing the same cycle of shameless mugging and half-awake delivery that she's always done. Brand's gab is most nearly charming when it's got a seductive object as its focus, but there's no give-and-go with Gerwig. This isn't a tremendous setback, as Naomi is only a distant-second love interest behind Hobson – Sir John Gielgud's Jeeves-ish manservant in the original, here become a nanny and played with starch and professionalism by Helen Mirren.

Brand's long, taut face has something of a grinning death's head in it, but there's little exploration of that harrowing suggestion in his capering, have-his-cake-and-eat-it performance, which pokes fun at the film's clichés ("Who is this loveable rogue who's rough round the edges with stars in his eyes?") while trotting along at their command. This is toe-the-line showoff, not subversion – how can you subvert a movie about the dilemma of giving away millions when the protagonist keeps the money in the end? Brand's squiffed voice sounds so much like an impression of Rik Mayall it's hardly a surprise to hear that he's been attached to a *Drop Dead Fred* remake (incidentally, another I-don't-want-to-grow-up property). There is none of Mayall's willingness to revolt audience sympathy in the rebranded Brand, however – this rebel comic wants the big time, and this is his foray into leading man-dom, a retailored old property back in fashion.

Like the addiction-flaunting star, also an executive producer here, Arthur cleans up in the new film, checking into AA. The Leo McCarey-esque convention this serves, in which a couple cannot unite before they are worthy of one another, should be touching, but this *Arthur* is every bit as slippery as its predecessor – it pretends to demean money, not-so-secretly worships it, and never seriously



Peter Pun: Russell Brand

attempts to understand it (Hal Ashby's *The Landlord* is a firm rebuke).

The new *Arthur* adds a bit of business with Jennifer Garner and Nick Nolte as Arthur's social-climbing arranged fiancée and her nouveau-riche, blue-collar-tough dad. When their essentially low-born natures are revealed in the end, it's a joke that gives the whole elitist game away. Bad behaviour, we're reminded, is the privilege of the privileged. ♦♦ Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Larry Breznier
Kevin McCormick
Chris Bender
Michael Tadross
Screenplay
Peter Baynham
Story
Steve Gordon
Based on *Arthur* written
and directed by Steve
Gordon

**Director of
Photography**
Uta Briesewitz
Edited by
Brent White
Production Designer
Sarah Knowles
Music
Theodore Shapiro
Sound Designers
Eugene Gearty
Richard King

**Costumes Designed
by**
Juliet Polcsa

CAST

Russell Brand
Arthur Bach
Helen Mirren
Hobson
Greta Gerwig
Naomi
Jennifer Garner
Susan Johnson
Geraldine James
Vivienne
Luis Guzmán
Bitterman
Nick Nolte
Burt Johnson
Christina Calph
Tiffany
Murphy Guyer
Officer Kaplan

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Entertainment Inc.
**Production
Companies**
Warner Bros. Pictures

presents a Kevin
McCormick/MBST
Entertainment/
Benderspink production
Executive Producers
Scott Kroopf
J.C. Spink
Russell Brand
Nik Linnen

**Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS**
In Colour
Prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

9,883 ft +8 frames

Attack the Block

France/United Kingdom 2011

Director: Joe Cornish

Certificate 15 87m 50s

Joe Cornish first made his name as co-presenter (with Adam Buxton) of Channel 4's *The Adam and Joe Show* (1996-2001), fondly remembered for re-enacting big-screen blockbusters with the aid of cuddly toys. Although technically far slicker and entirely live-action, his uproarious aliens-versus-hoodies feature debut *Attack the Block* betrays a similarly encyclopaedic genre knowledge, especially the Roger Corman-influenced films of the 1970s and 1980s that never allowed their high IQs and sociopolitical awareness to breach the fundamental requirement that they move like electrified greyhounds, preferably clocking in at under 90 minutes to facilitate drive-in double-billing.

Accordingly, *Attack the Block's* premise about an alien invasion and the ensuing siege of a single South London housing estate has umpteen nods to John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Escape from New York* (1981) and *The Thing* (1982), Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979) and *Streets of Fire* (1984), Joe Dante's *Gremlins* (1984) and the John Sayles-scripted *Piranha* (1978) and *Alligator* (1980), with a dash of French *cinéma du look* (*Divya*, 1981; *Subway*, 1985) and a Children's Film Foundation romp thrown in for good measure. However, Cornish never falls into the trap of creating gags around lazy name-checks, a fault that marred executive producer Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Hot Fuzz* (2007) by ensuring that disbelief could never be completely suspended.

Here the milieu is wholly convincing. The 'block', the fictional Wyndham Tower estate, hosts not just the film's hoodie protagonists but also their families (their higher-achieving female siblings being one of many passing nods to current sociological debates), to whom they have to make implausible excuses for staying out late. The mid-teenage gang members are viewed with suspicion by actual gangster Hi-Hatz but with admiration by nine-year-old wannabes Gavin and Reginald. 'Mayhem' and 'Probs', as they style themselves, have the excuse of extreme youth, whereas affluent white dopehead Brewis's attempts at blending in ("primatology, mammatology, all that shizzle") attract derision from everybody except his dealer Ron (Nick Frost), who would regard even the outbreak of World War III with amiably befuddled equanimity.

Cornish draws superb performances out of his inexperienced central quintet, especially John Boyega (taciturn Moses) and Alex Esmail (livewire Pest). Their knife-point mugging of trainee nurse Sam (Jodie Whittaker) risks audience alienation at the start, but likeable personalities quickly assert themselves with the aid of pungently witty dialogue (which Cornish developed

SYNOPSIS New York City, present day. Arthur Bach, scion of the Bach Worldwide conglomerate, is an irresponsible, alcoholic playboy. When he is arrested for drunk-driving a Batmobile into Wall Street's landmark bull statue, his mother seeks to assuage the fears of stockholders by arranging his marriage to Bach manager Susan Johnson – with the threat of disinheritance from his \$1 billion fortune if he doesn't obey. Susan, daughter of a self-made Pittsburgh real-estate tycoon, wants the prestige of the Bach name. Arthur, however, has set his sights on Naomi, an unlicensed tour guide who lives with her father in Queens.

Arthur romances Naomi by renting out Grand Central Station, while at the same time his wedding to Susan is being planned. When he drunkenly confesses his predicament to Naomi, she sends him packing. Arthur goes to an AA meeting and tries to hold down a job, but without success. When his lifelong nanny and protector Hobson falls sick, however, Arthur finds that he must for the first time in his life be the carer.

He calls off his wedding at the altar; Naomi isn't convinced by this gesture. Six months later he returns to her, clean and sober – and still in possession of his fortune – to whisk her off in his fleet of fantasy cars.



Hoods you win: 'Attack the Block'

with the cast and extensive pre-production research in local youth clubs) and the unsurprising revelation that their apparent menace is based more on bravado than being genuine hard cases like Hi-Hatz. But there's also justified resentment about the cards dealt in life, expressed generally through a longstanding (and mutual) hatred of the police, and directly through Moses's paranoid speculation that the alien invasion might have been government-sanctioned as part of a plan to wipe out London's black population.

In common with its models, the film favours old-fashioned mechanical special effects to create the "big alien gorilla-wolf motherfuckers" around whose invasion the plot revolves. These inspired combinations of shaggy black fur, glowing green fangs and lolling gait are simultaneously menacing and strangely beautiful, especially in a slow-motion shot of a group of them chasing a sword-wielding Moses down a corridor. Cinematographer Tom Townend turns exclusively nocturnal locations into a riot of neon-drenched colour reminiscent of Andrew Laszlo's work for Walter Hill, while the electronic throb of Steven Price's score betrays an unmistakable John Carpenter influence.

Films this cine-literate are rarely this unpretentiously enjoyable, but it's easy to see why it brought the house down at its South by Southwest festival premiere – even with people who struggled with some heroically uncompromising accents.

Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by
Nira Park
James Wilson
Written by
Joe Cornish
Director of Photography
Tom Townend
Editor
Jonathan Amos
Production Designer
Marcus Rowland
Music
Steven Price
Sound Designer
Jeremy Price
Costume Designer
Rosa Dias
Visual Effects
Double Negative
Additional:
Fido
Stunt Co-ordinator
Paul Herbert

CAST

John Boyega
Moses
Jodie Whittaker
Sam
Alex Esmail
Pest
Franz Drameh
Dennis
Leon Jones
Jerome
Simon Howard
Biggz
Luke Treadaway
Brewis
Jumayn Hunter
Hi-Hatz
Danielle Vitalis
Tia
Paige Meade
Dimples
Sammy Williams
Probs
Michael Ajao
Mayhem

Nick Frost
Ron
Maggie McCarthy
Margaret
Gina Antwi
Dionne
Natasha Jonas
Gloria

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Film Council, Channel
Four Television
Corporation
Production Companies
StudioCanal Features
Film 4 and UK Film
Council present a Big
Talk Pictures production
for StudioCanal, Film4
and UK Film Council
Made with the support
of the National Lottery
through the UK Film
Council's Development
Fund and Premiere
Fund
Executive Producers
Matthew Justice
Tessa Ross
Jenny Borgars
Will Clarke
Oliver Courson
Edgar Wright

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

7,905 ft +0 frames

Blitz

United Kingdom/France/USA 2010

Director: Elliott Lester

Certificate 18 97m 21s

Two detectives chase a serial killer targeting police. They're an odd couple – one is a volatile, hard-drinking maverick frustrated by station pen-pushers. The other is more careful, more orderly, but shouldn't be pushed. Sound familiar? Almost everything about Elliott Lester's *Blitz* sounds familiar, dialogue included. This is the kind of police thriller in which the maverick hero, Brant, is told early on, "No more bad publicity – that's the last thing this station needs right now!" The audience may well feel that more clichés are the last thing this film needs.

But they keep coming – *Blitz* looks as familiar as it sounds. Lester's vision is solidly referential, with not a shot ventured that hasn't already been tried in other films. Take the way the camera lifts slowly away in an aerial view from the killer's first victim, so that you can see the blood spreading and rain falling around the body. Architectural clichés pile up too: the dystopian concrete London tower block – a natural home for a sociopath! Or the therapist whose pretentiousness is signalled by his glass desk and floor-to-ceiling windows.

The characters are ciphers, which is a shame because for a murder-manhunt potboiler *Blitz* is relatively overloaded with acting talent. Paddy Considine does what he can with the under-written role of Nash (he's gay, so dresses smartly and has a nice kitchen). David Morrissey and Mark Rylance in particular seem wasted in cardboard cut-out parts as tabloid hack and grieving veteran officer respectively. Aidan Gillen imparts some genuine

malevolence to the role of police nemesis Weiss/Blitz – though at one point he seems to be dressed in homage to Paul Kaye's comic alter ego Dennis Pennis. Jason Statham at least appears to enjoy himself as Brant, who breakfasts on whisky and interviews witnesses in the pub, barking lines such as "Do I look like I carry a pencil?" So cartoonishly Dirty Harry-like is Brant that he introduces some moments of real comedy into the film.

The quality of the cast suggests Lester may have envisioned *Blitz* as a more credible, hard-boiled thriller. Expert Brit-crime B-movie merchant Nick Love would, you suspect, have wrung more out of the material to target readers of *Nuts* magazine, starting with a role for Danny Dyer. But *Blitz* is further hampered by a plot as undeveloped as its characters. The last act is set up when the police have to release Weiss for lack of evidence. Which is odd – given they hand him back on release an envelope stuffed with £50,000. You would think they might have linked this to the murder of a tabloid source with information about *Blitz* in which £50,000 was stolen. Films notionally this tough and gritty shouldn't ask you to suspend so much disbelief. DC Brant wouldn't take it – he'd have walked out in disgust and probably knocked out an usher on his way to the carpark. Sam Davies

CREDITS

Produced by
Zygi Kamasas
Steven Chasman
Donald Kushner
Brad Wyman
Screenplay
Nathan Parker
Based on the novel by
Ken Bruen
Director of Photography
Rob Hardy

Editor
John Gilbert
Production Designer
Max Gottlieb
Music Composed by
Ilan Eshkeri
Sound Recordist
Paddy Owen
Costume Designer
Suzannah Harman
Visual Effects Supervisor
Tom Collier
Stunt Co-ordinator
Gareth Milne



Putting on the blitz: Aidan Gillen, Jason Statham

SYNOPSIS South London, the present. Trainee nurse Sam is robbed by five hooded teenagers: Moses, Pest, Dennis, Jerome and Biggz. They are distracted by what appears to be a meteorite hitting a car, and Sam escapes. A small alien emerges from the 'meteorite'. Moses kills it and displays the corpse as a trophy. They take it to Ron, the cannabis specialist on their housing estate, though he, regular customer Brewis and drug dealer Hi-Hatz are unable to identify it.

More 'meteorites' fall, bearing much bigger aliens. During the ensuing chase, Hi-Hatz's associate Tonks is killed, Biggz is trapped in a wheelie bin and Moses is stopped by police and identified by Sam. The policemen are killed by aliens, and Sam and Moses are besieged in their van. They escape, and end up in Sam's flat with Pest, Dennis and Jerome. Pest has been bitten, and Sam stitches him up, earning the gang's respect. Biggz is rescued by nine-year-old aspiring gang members Probs and Mayhem. Aliens besiege the estate, killing Dennis. The gang and Sam head for Ron's ultra-secure hydroponic cannabis factory. Jerome and Hi-Hatz are killed en route. Ron's ultraviolet lighting system reveals splashes of liquid on Moses's jacket, and Brewis suggests that it's a pheromone from the first (female) alien, which explains the (male) aliens' desire to hunt them down. Moses lures the aliens to Sam's flat and blows them up with the aid of a gas cooker and fireworks.

The police arrest Moses, but a crowd outside hails him as a hero.

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SYNOPSIS London, the present. Brant, a detective, sees three youths breaking into his car. He beats them up; press reports depict the youths as innocent, and Brant is ordered to see a police psychologist.

When a WPC is shot dead, openly gay DC Nash is brought in to investigate, to the anger of the local force. WPC Falls, a former drugs officer, approaches Brant, hoping to help out a local boy, Metal, who has been kind to her since a period in rehab. Tabloid reporter Harold Dunlop receives calls from the killer, who calls himself 'Blitz'. The killer shoots another officer dead while on the line to Dunlop. Brant gets a tip-off about a gym from local snitch Radnor. Brant has bonded with Nash and the pair visit a suspect connected to the gym, Weiss. Weiss acts strangely but they leave after questioning him. Weiss – who is the killer – strikes again, trailing Brant's mentor Roberts to his flat, where he kills him.

Radnor follows Weiss to a car park where he's dumping evidence. Radnor arranges to lead Dunlop to the car for £50,000. However, Weiss moves the items, then follows them to a bar, where he kills Radnor. Brant, having remembered that he once hospitalised Weiss, checks the records and realises that Weiss is avenging himself on every officer who has ever arrested him – and Falls is next. Weiss attacks Falls before Brant can warn her, but she is saved by Metal, whom Weiss kills before fleeing.

Brant and Nash track Weiss to a hotel. After a chase they arrest him but have to let him go for lack of evidence. The next day, at Roberts's funeral, Weiss arrives disguised as a policeman, intending to kill Brant – but Brant leads him to a car park where Nash is waiting and the two corner the killer. Brant tells Weiss that as he's wearing police uniform, 'Blitz' will be blamed for the murder, then shoots him.

CAST

Jason Statham
Brant
Paddy Considine
Nash
Aidan Gillen
Weiss
Zawe Ashton
Falls
David Morrissey
Dunlop
Ned Dennehy
Radnor
Mark Rylance
Roberts
Luke Evans
Stokes
Nicky Henson
Superintendent Brown
Steven Harwood
Brown
Metal
Bill Champion
Dr Leonard
Richard Riddell
McDonald
Ron Donachie
Cross
Ellie Fairman
Sandra
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Production
Companies
Lionsgate UK presents
with Davis Films
In association with

Current Entertainment,
Kushner/Wyman
Productions
Executive Producers
Guy Avshalom
Ken Bruen
Alwyn Hight Kushner
Nick Manzi
Samuel Hadida

Dolby Digital/SDDS/
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

8,762 ft +0 frames

Cedar Rapids

USA 2011

Director: Miguel Arteta

Certificate 15 86m 51s

In *Cedar Rapids*, a thirtysomething man-child undergoes a belated coming-of-age, flying his provincial nest for the iniquities of the city. Hardly virgin movie territory, yet it proves surprisingly diverting in Miguel Arteta's bawdy comedy. Its producers are Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor, whose Midwestern satires – *Citizen Ruth* (1996), *Election* (1999), *About Schmidt* (2002) – can't help but loom over this film's Iowa setting. But despite the familiarly wan convention halls and dowdy offices on show, Phil Johnston's script prefers to keep things jovial; the occasional jolt of pathos so often lurking in Payne's work is mostly absent here. As a comedy, it probably falls somewhere closer to the profane but gooeey-centred output of Judd Apatow, but laced with Arteta's customarily droll handling.

After *The Hangover* (2009), Ed Helms is probably best known for his fractious salesman character in the US version of *The Office*. *Cedar Rapids* puts him back in white-collar sales – insurance, to be exact – but his Tim Lippe is the polar opposite of *The Office*'s Andy Bernard. Tim is ineffably decent but chronically unworldly, never having strayed from his tiny Wisconsin backwater. He does, however, manage to maintain weekly assignments of a worryingly oedipal nature with his former high-school teacher (Sigourney Weaver). When his company's star salesman meets a bizarre end, Tim is dispatched to an industry convention in the titular city, where he hopes to retain the prestigious 'Two Diamonds' award. On arrival, Tim is like a time traveller from the past, both wowed and alarmed by such banalities as electronic hotel keys and fake palm trees – "It's like I'm in Barbados or something," he marvels.

Sharing a hotel room with Tim is straitlaced Ronald (Isiah Whitlock Jr), who lists his hobbies as antiques, community theatre and *The Wire* (a rather self-conscious running gag, given that Whitlock Jr was a series regular), and divorced boozehound Dean 'Deanzie' Ziegler (John C. Reilly), whose mind is perpetually in the gutter. Under Deanzie's unsavoury tutelage, teetotal Tim has his horizons broadened and learns that the convention's squeaky-clean veneer may well conceal disturbing secrets. It's Reilly who steals the show here, brilliantly inhabiting the fleshy, unapologetically filthy Deanzie, but there's also fine support from Anne Heche as Joan, a sardonic saleswoman who eyes Tim as her latest extramarital bunk-up. It's Joan who provides the film's sole Payne-esque shift into a rueful minor key, as she admits to Tim that she was once adventurous, but married and had children too young.

Tim can be seen as the latest naïf in Arteta's gallery of sheltered characters (willingly or not) attempting to break out; the stunted Buck bamboozled by the bright lights of LA in *Chuck & Buck*



The adjuster: Ed Helms

(2000); Jennifer Aniston's stifled Nowheresville cuckold in *The Good Girl* (2002); even Michael Cera's suburban dreamer in *Youth in Revolt* (2009). But Tim also resembles a younger version of Jack Nicholson's eponymous retiree in *About Schmidt* – both insurance men, blithely ignorant of the world outside their doorstep. Ultimately, Tim's plot arc is pure Capra – the idealistic small-town boy goes to the city, takes on a corrupt figurehead and wins over a crowd with a heartfelt speech. But if the narrative is conventional and a little half-baked, the uniformly entertaining performances make up for it. This might have been a relentlessly sour corporate comedy in other hands, but Arteta makes light and earthy work out of it. ➡ **Matthew Taylor**

CREDITS

Produced by
Jim Burke
Alexander Payne
Jim Taylor
Written by
Phil Johnston
Director of
Photography
Chuy Chávez

Film Editor
Eric Kissack
Production Designer
Doug Meerdink
Music
Christophe Beck
Sound Mixer
Thomas Varga
Costume Designer
Hope Hanafin

CAST

Ed Helms
Tim Lippe
John C. Reilly
Dean Ziegler
Anne Heche
Joan Ostrowski-Fox
Isiah Whitlock Jr
Ronald Wilkes
Stephen Root
Bill Krogstad
Kurtwood Smith
Orin Helgesson
Alia Shawkat
Bree
Thomas Lennon
Roger Lemke
Rob Corddry
Gary
Mike O'Malley
Mike Pyle
Sigourney Weaver
Macy Vanderhei
Inga R. Wilson
Gwen Lemke
Mike Birbiglia
Trent
Seth Morris
Uncle Ken

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Korea and Spain)

Production
Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures
presents an Ad
Hominem Enterprises
production
Made in association
with Dune
Entertainment
Executive Producer
Ed Helms

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
Colour by
Technicolor
Prints by
DeLuxe
[L85:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

7,816 ft +12 frames

SYNOPSIS US, the present. Tim Lippe, a contented but unworldly salesman for Brown Star Insurance, has never left his small Wisconsin hometown. After the freakish death of Roger, the company's star salesman, Tim is sent to represent the firm at the industry's annual convention in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the hope of retaining the coveted Two Diamonds award.

Tim finds himself sharing a hotel room with straitlaced Ronald Wilkes and coarse boozier Dean Ziegler. Dean claims that guild president Orin Helgesson, spurred by rumours of Roger's alleged deviancy, is behind a petition to rescind Brown Star's previous awards. During a night of partying, Tim is seduced by married executive Joan, but the two are caught by the disapproving Orin. Joan, disclosing a previous affair with Roger, reveals to Tim that Roger had bribed Orin for his awards. Due to Tim's indiscretions, Orin dismisses his award chances. However, when Tim reluctantly offers money, Orin grants him the award and tears up the petition against Brown Star. Tim accompanies a local prostitute to a house party, where he takes drugs and gets into a fight. He is rescued by Dean, Ronald and Joan. Tim learns that his boss plans to sell Brown Star to a rival, using Tim's award success as leverage. At the award ceremony, Tim confesses that he bribed Orin; Dean, Ronald and Joan round up Tim's loyal clients to vouch for his essential decency. Without Tim's clients and award prestige, the sale of Brown Star is called off.

Tim later starts his own agency with Dean, Ronald and Joan.

Cooking with Stella

Canada/United Kingdom/India/USA 2009
Director: Dilip Mehta

Dilip Mehta's feature debut is a dish that has some tasty elements but is simultaneously undercooked and overcooked in parts, the hallmark of a confused chef.

Mehta, hitherto known as the director of the documentary *The Forgotten Woman* (2008) and as producer of his sister Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005), begins promisingly enough by introducing half-Indian diplomat Maya Chopra, who is sequestered in the Canadian High Commission compound in New Delhi with her out-of-work chef husband Michael and their baby daughter Zara. Initially Maya prefers to remain insular and embassy-bound, choosing not to engage with her Indian roots, but the film opens up when Michael decides to accompany their housekeeper Stella, who has agreed to teach him her cookery skills, to the local bazaar. Here the colours, sights and sounds of Delhi are gorgeously captured by Giles Nuttgens, in welcome contrast to

the sterile compound visuals – and it's here we learn of Stella's nefarious business of taking cuts from vendors and pilfering and selling Canadian duty-free goods. The film benefits at this stage from some hunger-inducing cooking montages, but sadly the plot goes awry with the introduction of Tannu, the baby's nanny, who soon becomes embroiled in Stella's schemes. The subsequent introduction of a ludicrous kidnapping subplot is enough to send the film firmly off the rails.

The script, by Deepa and Dilip Mehta, is the chief offender, portraying all Indian officials as self-important, self-righteous buffoons and all servants and tradesmen as thieves. The film itself is too slight for this to provoke offence, and Mehta does capture some of the upstairs/downstairs attitudes well, especially in a phone call from Maya's mother in Canada, who imparts the sage advice: "Servants will never be family." And of course, in this 'crime always pays' comedy, it's too much to expect a moral compass for any of the characters. But spare a thought for baby Zara – the poor child has a father who is more interested in cooking than her, a mother who is working all the time, a nanny who is a thief, and a housekeeper who is a bigger crook than the nanny. A virtual orphan, much like the plot of *Cooking with Stella*.

◆◆ Naman Ramachandran

CREDITS

Produced by
David Hamilton
Screenplay
Deepa Mehta
Dilip Mehta
Director of Photography
Giles Nuttgens
Film Editor
Gareth C. Scales
Production Designer
Tamara Deverell
Music Score
Mychael Danina
Anirudh Vaz
Sound Recordist
Sylvain Arseneault
Costume Designer
Rashmi Varma

CAST

Seema Biswas
Stella Elizabeth Matthews
Hitender Kumar
immigration officer
Sue Macartney
Fiona
Alexiane Perreault
Zara
Don McKellar
Michael Laffont
Lisa Ray
Maya Chopra
Arun Sode
gardener

Mulchand Dedhia
vegetable seller
Annie Desjardins
Saind
Shriya Saran
Tannu

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Production Companies
Mongrel Media presents a Hamilton Mehta production
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada, the Ontario Media Development Corporation, Noble Nomad Pictures Ltd.
Executive Producers
Deepa Mehta
Sanjay Bhutiani
Ravi Chopra
David Hamilton

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Mara Pictures

Everywhere & Nowhere

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Menhaj Huda

Those who were impressed by the music-driven kineticism of Bangladesh-born, British-based director Menhaj Huda's 2006 feature debut *Kidulthood* but irritated by its posturing excesses will be reassured by the more sober tone of this, his first writer-director project, aided by script work from Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti.

The MTV-style, up-tempo opening credit sequence seems to suggest that Huda may have offered his talented cinematographer Brian Tufano some opportunity for experiment and fun in expressing the vibrant energy and multi-ethnic swim of contemporary London club life. But as Huda's realist-edged, increasingly disconsolate coming-of-age drama develops – plays out, one might say, rather than develops – so Tufano's fine eye for urban compositions seems to tire.

The talent Huda showed in handling a young ensemble cast in *Kidulthood* (and various TV projects) is in evidence in *Everywhere & Nowhere*, notably in scenes where Ash, its frustrated 20-year-old central protagonist, banters with his trio of friends. But even here, as throughout the film, it is stymied and coarsened by the awkwardness, inconsistencies and simplicities of the writing. The alienation, dilemmas and unnecessarily secretive lives the film seeks to dramatise – of young second-generation members of immigrant families caught between the rock of incomplete assimilation and the hard place of traditionalist expectations – alongside the director's putative progressive intentions, are too often dissipated, confused or lost by inappropriate hyperbole, misused irony or bald caricature. (A scene set during a cricket match, where the naive lover of one of Ash's friends is ridiculed for wearing a sari, is plain offensive.)

That said, James Floyd gives a good account of himself as Ash, providing a sense of dignity and sympathy in what is a fundamentally passive role. *Kidulthood* veteran Adam Deacon, as Ash's self-possessed pal Zaf, adds a spark of spirit and feeling to this otherwise emotionally undeveloped movie, even if the contributions of stalwart actors such as Art Malik and Saeed Jaffrey are wasted. The impact of the film's music – with an original score by The Angel and a rich Bangla-to-crossover soundtrack – is minimised too by its use, either by default or intention, as an expression of escapism rather than a more fully integrated element of the film's dramatic exposition.

◆◆ Wally Hammond



Pushing their luck: Don McKellar, Lisa Ray

SYNOPSIS South London, the present. Ash, a 20-year-old middle-class British Asian, enthusiastically mixes Bollywood soundtracks and contemporary rap on the decks in his bedroom. In the absence of his father, the house is dominated by the authoritarian rule of self-important elder brother Ahmed. Visiting the council home of his working-class mixed-race best friend Zaf and his dope-smoking father, Ash finds a warmer and more natural sense of family. Zaf and Ash join friends Riz and Jaz. They drive in Jaz's father's BMW to a central London club where they meet successful British African-Caribbean DJ Ronnie, who dismisses Ash's entreaties to let him take to the decks. Later, at a party hosted by a wealthy Asian acquaintance in a Lambeth high-rise, Ash is disgusted to discover that his host has supplied (white) prostitutes for his guests, and dismayed to find Yasmin, a friend's sister, in suicidal mood, partly because of the restrictive covenants of her family. Ash meets Swedish photographer Bella at the party and a relationship ensues despite Ash's initial aggressive lovemaking. Ronnie agrees to let Ash play an opening slot at the club. However, Ash's arrival at the club is delayed when Jaz is arrested for possession of Islamist pamphlets and Zaf's father has a heart attack. Despite the arrival of a drunken Jaz at the club, Ash's first set is a success.

Tired of restrictions at home and angered by his brother's hypocrisy - Ahmed has been conducting a secret affair and has got his girlfriend pregnant - Ash publicly exposes Ahmed's infidelity and moves out to join Bella. He pauses at her door and heads off alone.

CREDITS

Produced by
Sam Tomans
Screenplay
Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti
Menhaj Huda
Story
Menhaj Huda
Additional Writing
Nazrin Choudhury
Director of Photography
Brian Tufano
Editor
Stuart Gazzard
Production Designer
Murray McKeown
Original Music Written, Produced and Arranged by
The Angel
Costume Designer
Matt Price

**Piano/Keyboards/
Tuned Percussion/
Strings/Programming**
The Angel
Sound Recordist
Giancarlo Dellapina
Stunt Co-ordinator
Clive Curtis

CAST

James Floyd
Ash
Adam Deacon
Zaf
Aly Khan
Ahmed
Elyes Gabel
Jaz
Neet Mohan
Riz
Katia Winter
Bella

Simon Webbe
Ronnie
Shivani Ghai
Sairah
Shaheen Khan
Rubena
Farzana Dua Elahe
Nadia
Ronny Jhutti
Salim
Dexter Fletcher
police officer
James Buckley
Jamie
Art Malik
Uncle Mirza
Saeed Jaffrey
Zaf's dad

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Limited
Production Companies
Arena Productions

presents a 20ten Media
and Fotón Films
production in
association with
Luskentyre
Executive Producer
Mark Blythe

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

Forget Me Not

United Kingdom 2009

Directors: Alexander Holt,
Lance Roehrig

This low-budget, London-set indie from debut feature directors Alexander Holt and Lance Roehrig begins with thirtysomething hero Will contemplating suicide. With a neat symmetry, it ended with this viewer feeling almost as demoralised.

In the 93 long minutes in between, Will has a chance encounter with barmaid Eve and walks with her over the course of a night and a day, talking about life and love and sex and God, their two souls connecting against the backdrop of the city. So far, so *Before Sunrise*. But unlike that film, this offers little to make us fall for the central characters as they fall for each other. Given little in the way of convincing dialogue, Genevieve O'Reilly (*Spooks*, *The Young Victoria*) and Tobias Menzies (*Brutus in Rome*) seem woefully miscast as - respectively - Eve, a 'free spirit' who comes across more as a pre-school English teacher, and moody musician Will, a man who carries around with him both his guitar (I'm afraid to say there is quite a bit of singing) and his sad secret.

The film's London is equally unconvincing, an alternative urban reality where pub singers are politely applauded, where there are no queues for the London Eye and rain falls only artfully. Our protagonists' walk seemingly takes them from Soho to Camden to Tower Bridge via photo-opportunity scenic spots: the Millennium Bridge makes an appearance, obviously, though oddly we are spared the Gherkin. If only we were keener to listen in on Will and Eve's romance, perhaps we'd spend less time asking ourselves why they don't just hop on a night bus. The fact that the film shares its title with some 22 other features, shorts and TV series listed on IMDb was perhaps a warning that originality might be in short supply. Still, the filmmakers do make London look twinkly-Thames beautiful - you could fall in love with the capital watching this movie, if not with its hero and heroine.

The film is a debut feature effort not only for its directors but also for writers



Genevieve O'Reilly, Tobias Menzies

Rebecca Long, Steve Spence and Mark Underwood. And there's a moment now and then when they pull things together: Gemma Jones as Eve's nan, drifting away into dementia; a silent iPod party; a visual joke with nuns. But *Forget Me Not*? I fear I will.

♦♦ Jane Lamacraft

CREDITS

Produced by
Rebecca Long
Screenplay
Mark Underwood
Story
Rebecca Long
Steve Spence
Mark Underwood
Director of Photography
Shane Daly
Editor
Kant Pan
**Music by/Conductor/
Arranger**
Michael J. McEvoy
Sound Mixer
Simon Gilman
Costume Designer
Matt Price

CAST

Tobias Menzies
Will Fletcher
Genevieve O'Reilly
Eve Fisher
Gemma Jones
Lizzie Fisher
Luke de Woolfson
Luke
Charlie Covell
Carly

Susie Harriett
Suze
Nigel Cooke
Jim

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Production Company
A Quicksilver Films
production

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Home
Entertainment



Getting to know you: James Floyd, Katia Winter

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Thirtysomething Will is a musician who sings in a bar in the evenings. Returning home depressed one night, he contemplates suicide, but is interrupted when Eve, who works in the bar, is assaulted by a drunken customer on the street outside. Will intervenes, then accompanies Eve on her journey across London to a party. They are drawn to one another, but when Eve asks Will about himself he becomes angry. Upset, she hurries to her party alone. Will contemplates throwing himself in the Thames, but instead follows Eve to the party; they dance. Later, walking along the Thames at dawn, they are about to kiss when Will again rejects Eve.

Having been up all night, Eve asks Will to help her stay awake for an appointment later that day with her grandmother Lizzie's doctor. Will accompanies Eve to the meeting, where she is upset to learn that Lizzie, who brought her up, has Alzheimer's. Leaving the care home, Eve and Will are caught in a rainstorm. After going to Will's apartment to dry off, they almost sleep together, but once again Will backs off. Distraught, Eve runs out into the rain; Will follows and explains that he has a degenerative condition that will affect his mind, robbing him of his memories. The film's ending implies they will spend whatever time he has left together.

Hanna

USA/Germany 2011

Director: Joe Wright

Certificate 12A 111m 21s

After the prestige adaptations *Atonement* (2007) and *The Soloist* (2009), director Joe Wright engages in some genre tourism with a 'baby Bourne' adventure tricked up with vaguely anime stylings, which feels, despite the violence, bloodless. Working again with saucer-eyed Saoirse Ronan, Wright approaches this story of a killer naïf with his own naivety, as if no one had ever made a movie with a blank-slate protagonist (sample howler: "What does music feel like?"). Uneven plotting, which undermines the bid for pathos, and an unsuccessfully witchy Cate Blanchett as a murderous CIA official, make for a movie that's like sub-par Neil Jordan with pummeling action sequences.

Snaggle-haired Hanna (Ronan) lives in an Arctic redoubt where her father Erik (Eric Bana) has schooled her in isolation as an MMA-fighting, multilingual agent-to-be. Her mysterious mission, which she has been taught she has no choice but to accept, is to survive the onslaught of a nemesis that turns out to be CIA head Marissa Wiegler (Blanchett). In a movie-length chase spanning Morocco, Spain and Germany – where Hanna is to rendezvous with Papa – she escapes death and finds a substitute family that includes a hippified tolerant mother (Olivia Williams) and a snarky but admiring brat (Jessica Barden).

Curiosity about *Hanna* turns on its casting: do you really get to see ass-kicking performed by Ronan, who looks waifish (in the street-urchin, not supermodel, sense) and even younger than her teenage years? The answer is yes, but: Ronan plays Hanna true to the character's bizarre upbringing, her face conveying equal parts vacancy and vulnerability, her

attitude ready for tactical but not emotional challenges. It's an admirable decision, and along with Barden and company, makes for the only truly thought-out performances in the film.

Perhaps in response to Ronan/Hanna's preternatural poise, or to anxieties over the film's mass appeal, Wright dumps amped-up Chemical Brothers beats over action and chase scenes to make clear that pulses are to be pounding. It's distracting, and sounds about as slick as Dad asking for "the latest act". Wright also gets in the way of promising fight fracas with circling cameras, and makes ill-fated attempts now and again at nihilistic mood in scenes involving Marissa's contract killer Tom Hollander, who looks blond-dyed like Dirk Bogarde in the similarly comic-booky *Modesty Blaise*, (1966). But the sun-drenched landscapes and architectural geometries framed by frequent Lynne Ramsay DP Alwin Küchler are often eye-catching (such as an underground bunker where Hanna is early on imprisoned).

Wright's fulsome tendencies are aggravated by Seth Lochhead and David Farr's screenplay. Among other offences, Hanna finds safe haven in Berlin with a German trickster-confidant who lives in a fairytale house and, in an appalling bit of laziness, a key moment of self-discovery comes via Google. (For all I know, that's how a teenage killing machine in the real world might find out about her origins, but it's not good movie material.)

Hanna has its spiffy moments, no question, and on balance, it's better that a filmmaker like Wright try something different. And Ronan's stringency (punctuated by sweet moments of innocence) makes for one of the better, less cynical attempts at filling the void of young female fighters on screen. But *Hanna* marks a missed opportunity, because the rampant, relatively unexamined perversity in its premises could have been fun, moving and disturbing, all at once. ♦♦ Nicolas Rapold



Bourne to be wild: Saoirse Ronan

CREDITS

Produced by
Leslie Holleran
Marty Adelstein
Scott Nemes
Screenplay
Seth Lochhead
David Farr
Director of Photography
Alwin Küchler
Film Editor
Paul Tothill
Production Designer
Sarah Greenwood
Music by/Music Score
Produced by
The Chemical Brothers
Sound Designers
Craig Berkey
Chris Scarabosio
Costume Designer
Lucie Bates
Stunt Co-ordinator/Action Design and Fight Choreographer
Jeff Imada
Stunt Co-ordinators
John Koyama
Hiro Koda

CAST

Saoirse Ronan
Hanna
Eric Bana
Erik Heller
Tom Hollander
Isaacs
Olivia Williams
Rachel
Jason Flemyng
Sebastian
Jessica Barden
Sophie
Cate Blanchett
Marissa Wiegler
Vicky Krieps
Johanna Zadeck
John MacMillan
Lewis
Aldo Maland
Miles
Gudrun Ritter
Katrin Zadeck
Martin Wuttke
Knepfier

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Production Companies
Focus Features presents
a Jow Wright film
A Holleran Company
production
A Sechzehnte
Babelsberg Film
GmbH/Neunte
Babelsberg Film GmbH
co-production
Produced in association
with Twins Financing
LLC
Produced with the
support of MBB –
Medienboard Berlin-
Brandenburg GmbH,
Filmförderung
Hamburg Schleswig-
Holstein, DFFF –
Deutscher
Filmförderfonds, FFA –
Filmförderungsanstalt
German Federal Film
Board
Executive Producer
Barbara A. Hall

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

10,021 ft +8 frames

German theatrical title
Wer ist Hanna?

SYNOPSIS North Finland, the present. Teenager Hanna has been raised as a killer in the isolated wilderness by ex-CIA father Erik. One day she decides to activate a satellite beacon notifying CIA agent Marissa, whom she knows only as her nemesis. After Erik leaves with the intention of reuniting later in Berlin, CIA assault forces swoop and take Hanna to an underground facility in Morocco for interrogation.

Hanna fights her way out and finds herself in the middle of the desert. She joins up with a vacationing family, and becomes friends with their daughter Sophie. Meanwhile Marissa sends an agent after her. When the family reaches Spain, Hanna makes a narrow escape in a shipyard, but her former hosts are cruelly detained.

In Berlin, Marissa hides out with a friendly magician in a fairytale house in a park. Through Google, she learns more about her history (which involves Erik's vendetta with Marissa over a botched assassination). Erik and Hanna meet, and she learns that she is the product of a genetics experiment, and not really his daughter. Marissa catches up and kills Erik. Hanna escapes and, after a chase, kills Marissa.

Heartbeats

Canada/France 2010

Director: Xavier Dolan

Certificate 15 100m 53s

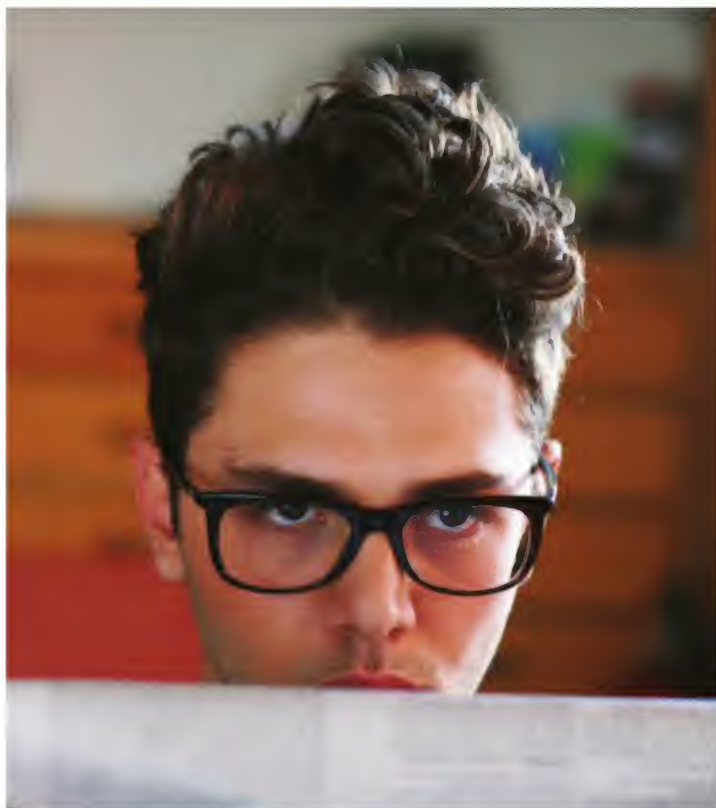
Heartbeats is Xavier Dolan's second movie; his first, *J'ai tué ma mère* (*I Killed My Mother*), made a big impact on its release in 2009, winning prizes and nominations all over the place. One can see why, in retrospect: it wasn't just the youth of the director (though even today 20 is young to be making a fully fledged first feature), it was the emotional intelligence of the screenplay, and of the acting, that struck the viewer – the clever way in which the film approached the subject of the 'unbearable mother' and took our sympathies to places one might not have expected them to go. The furious tirades between mother and son that make the film memorable are undercut in the last resort by the evocation of a strangely moving tenderness and forgiveness.

Love, then – or, one might say, 'perverse' love – was the subject of that first film, as it is of its successor, though we have moved away from the constrictions of the family. Marie (Monia Chokri) and Francis (Dolan) are sophisticated metropolitans in Montreal, financially independent (the viewer isn't quite sure how, but it doesn't matter) and fond of each other. He is a young and timid gay, she one of those striking but not quite beautiful fashionistas, hiding her vulnerability behind a mask of caustic sassiness. One can certainly see why they would be friends, just as one can see how that friendship will find itself challenged when both succumb to the same object of desire, a curly-headed Adonis named Nicolas (Niels Schneider).

'Style' is the subject of the film and also, one can immediately see, its problem. Approached unsympathetically, it would be quite possible to hate these people, so inert are they to the wider political world, so blithely enmeshed in their culture of hedonism. It's possible for the viewer to get a little indignant: why should anyone wish to spend the best part of two hours in the company of such posers? And what is the filmmaker's own view of the matter? Is he complicit in their narcissism, or is he criticising it?

The debts to elegant cinematic predecessors are plain to see – Godard is referenced, as well as Truffaut. Wong Kar-Wai is there in the mix, along with Almodóvar, Bertolucci, Cocteau-Melville (*Les Enfants terribles*) and Alfred de Musset. Audrey Hepburn and James Dean are further iconic presences in the film. Let us add an overemphatic and derivative musical track (the Spanish song 'Bang Bang' utilised not once but twice) which, combined with an astonishingly frequent recourse to slow-motion cinematography, allies the 'look' of the film to the world of the pop promo. But does it matter?

Those who hate the film will hate it anyway. Others may well be charmed precisely by its aesthetic brashness. Like *J'ai tué ma mère*, it is full of lively verbal



A matter of style: Xavier Dolan

← sparring: Dolan has an ear for crisp dialogue and tirades, and for the nuances and extravagances of the street. What is said is well rendered, but also what is *not* said. The audience can see long before the principal characters that Nicolas, the golden-haired object of desire, is nothing but a tease and a heartbreaker. Still, beauty has its own rules – and certainly this languid fellow is beautiful (a dream montage sequence compares him, not unconvincingly, to Michaelangelo's David). Yes, he might be 'worthless', but that doesn't make the experience of loving him – desiring him – any less painful for our characters. In this respect the psychology of the film is pinpoint accurate. All of us, I suppose, have pined in this way – secretly, abjectly, hopelessly – at some stage in our emotional history. ♦♦ **Mark Le Fanu**

CREDITS

Produced by
Xavier Dolan
Daniel Morin
Carole Mondello
Screenplay/Dialogue
Xavier Dolan

Director of Photography
Stéphanie Weber-Biron
Film Editor
Xavier Dolan
Art Director
Delphine Gélinais

Sound Designer
Sylvain Brassard
Costume Designer
Xavier Dolan
Visual Designer
Xavier Dolan

CAST

Monia Chokri
Marie Camille
Niels Schneider
Nicolas
Xavier Dolan
Francis
Anne Dorval
Desirée, Nicolas' mother
Anthony Huneault
Antonin
Jody Hargreaves
Jody
Clara Palardy
Clara
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Production Companies
Produced with the financial participation of Mifilfilms Inc., Québec – Crédit d'impôt cinéma et télévision, Crédit d'impôt pour production cinématographique ou magnétoscopique canadienne – Canada,

Radio-Canada

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Network Releasing

9,079 ft +5 frames

French theatrical title
Les Amours imaginaires

Hop

USA/Japan 2011
Director: Tim Hill
Certificate U 94m 53s

A few weeks ago Gore Verbinski served up *Rango*, a western featuring a cast of computer-animated lizards. *Rango*, however, feels positively conventional beside *Hop*. Directed by Tim Hill (who handled furry CGI lead actors in *Garfield 2* and *Alvin and the Chipmunks*), this shapeless film – which is supposedly aimed at families but seems to have no real target audience in mind at all – has Russell Brand voicing E.B., a rebellious rabbit who wants to be a drummer rather than deliver Easter eggs.

The opening minutes promise a rather charming, straightforward family film. We open on Easter Island, where E.B. is being raised by the current Easter Bunny (voiced by Hugh Laurie) to take over the season's responsibilities. The opening credits depict the cavernous Easter-making factory (under an Easter Island statue) as something between Willy Wonka's home and the giant CGI hive in *Bee Movie* (2007). "This is so cool," E.B. enthuses, and most audiences would agree. Then the film skips 20 years forward, and becomes very odd.

Now predominantly live-action, the film follows a purposeless slacker (James Marsden) and his misadventures with E.B.; along the way there are gags about Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies, *Fatal Attraction*'s bunny-boiling and E.B.'s ability to excrete jellybeans. If that weren't enough, David Hasselhoff turns up halfway through, playing himself, though he's far less likeable than when he last gatecrashed a cartoon film – *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* – in 2004. When Marsden asks why he's not surprised by a talking rabbit, Hasselhoff explains that his best friend is a talking car, which is a gag aimed at the thirtysomethings who remember the TV show *Knight Rider*.

E.B. has some genuinely funny moments (especially when he's impersonating a stuffed toy or a ventriloquist's dummy) but Brand still seems perversely miscast in a film that's forever changing its mind about where it wants to go. It finally settles on being an Easter variant on *The Santa Clause* (1994), an idea that's representative of the whole film's wonkiness. Among the voice actors, Laurie does his best to anchor things, as does *The Simpsons'* Hank Azaria as a bad-guy Easter chick. But one gets the feeling that *Hop* started



Little drummer boy: 'Hop'

life as a perfectly decent holiday picture before being hijacked by a Hollywood executive with a peculiar sense of humour, who turned the film into an expensive private joke.

♦♦ **Andrew Osmond**

CREDITS

Produced by
Chris Meledandri
Michele Imperato
Stabile
Screenplay
Cinco Paul
Ken Daurio
Brian Lynch
Story
Cinco Paul
Ken Daurio
Director of Photography
Peter Lyons Collister
Edited by
Peter S. Elliott
Gregory Perler
Production Designer
Richard Holland
Music Composed and Conducted by
Christopher YOUNG
Sound Design
Ann Scibelli
Costume Designer
Alexandra Welker
Visual Effects and Animation by
Rhythm & Hues Studios
Animation Supervisor
Chris A. Bailey

Hugh Laurie
voice of E.B.'s dad
Tiffany Espensen
Alex O'Hare
David Hasselhoff
David Hasselhoff
Chelsea Handler
Mrs Beck
Dustin Ybarra
Cody
Django Marsh
voice of young E.B.

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association with Relativity Media an Illumination Entertainment production
In association with Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producer
John Cohen

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

8,539 ft +8 frames

CAST

James Marsden
Fred O'Hare
Russell Brand
voice of E.B.
Kaley Cuoco
Sam O'Hare
Hank Azaria
voices of Carlos/Phil
Gary Cole
Henry O'Hare
Elizabeth Perkins
Bonnie O'Hare

SYNOPSIS On Easter Island, young rabbit E.B. is being groomed to succeed his father, the current Easter Bunny, who delivers chocolate around the world. However, E.B. dreams of being a drummer and runs away from home to nurture his talent. In Los Angeles, he meets Fred O'Hare, a young man who's being pushed by his family to get a steady job.

E.B. pretends to be the Easter Bunny, delighting Fred, who caught a glimpse of E.B.'s father decades ago. After various mishaps, E.B. performs in a talent show run by celebrity David Hasselhoff, who signs him up. Fred becomes convinced that he can become the next Easter Bunny, and E.B. helps him train. Meanwhile, the Easter Bunny sends his pink bunny ninjas to find E.B.; thinking that Fred has cooked E.B., the ninjas take Fred back to Easter Island, just as Carlos, a rebellious Easter chick, attempts a coup. E.B. rushes back to Easter Island and defeats Carlos with the power of his drumming.

Fred and E.B. take on the Easter Bunny's duties together.

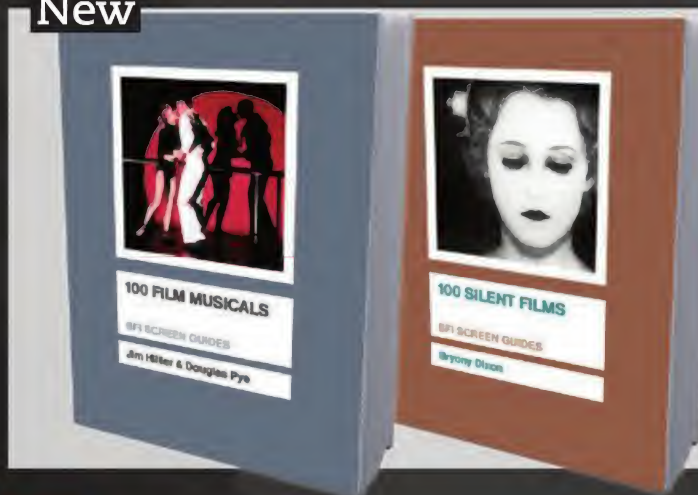
SYNOPSIS Montreal, the present. Francis, a young gay man, and Marie, a student of fashion, enjoy a platonic companionship. At a party they spot a handsome young newcomer to the neighbourhood, Nicolas, who in subsequent meetings reciprocates their interest. Soon, on an occasional basis, the trio are sharing a bed, though the question of whether Nicolas is basically gay or straight becomes a point of issue between Francis and Marie. Francis is more open in his desire and admiration for Nicolas. Marie at first feigns indifference, though it soon becomes obvious that she too has fallen under his spell. A trip to the country during which Nicolas seems to favour Francis ends disastrously when Marie is unable to conceal her jealousy. Back in Montreal, Nicolas's interest in the pair wanes – his wealthy eccentric mother has emerged on the scene and he decides to travel abroad.

A year later Nicolas has returned. Marie and Francis meet him at a party, and his spell over them seems at last to have been broken.

The film is interspersed with interviews in which Montreal twentysomethings give their thoughts on sex and love.

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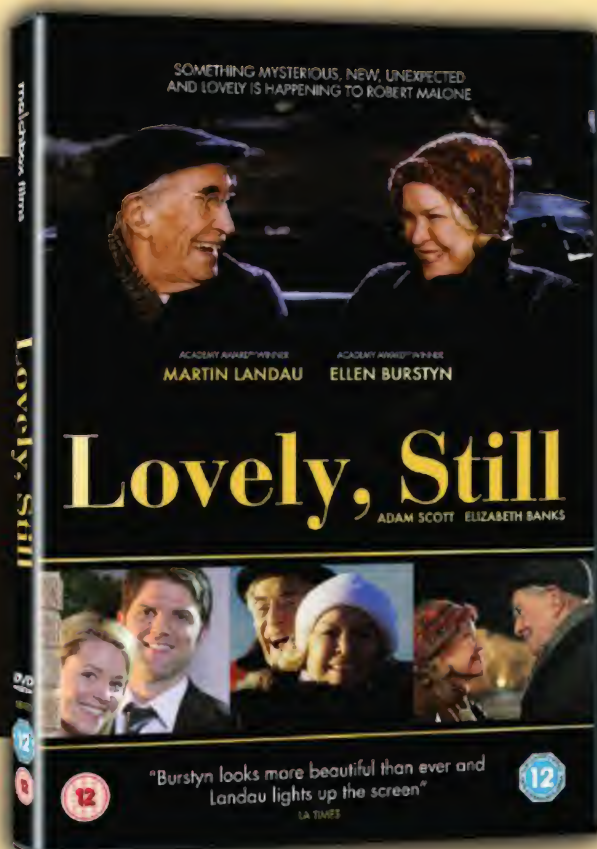


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"Burstyn looks more beautiful than ever
and Landau lights up the screen"

L.A. TIMES



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Insidious

United Kingdom/
Canada/USA 2010
Directors: James Wan
Certificate 15 102m 12s

Certain films defeat criticism. Many comedies for instance – *EuroTrip*, *Back to School* and *Caddyshack II* come to mind – have ordinary premises, aren't directed that well, feature performers no one much cares about and have only trace elements of actual humour, but they achieve a pass grade simply because they're consistently funny. Every few minutes something comes along that makes you laugh, even if you're instantly ashamed of the reaction.

Insidious is the horror-film equivalent.

Director James Wan and writer/actor Leigh Whannell founded a franchise with their first film, *Saw* (2004), a zeitgeist-catching effort as intricately constructed, razor-edged and clever as its villain's death-traps. It may be that the literal cutting edge of *Saw* isn't where the team really want to work, because their immediate follow-up, the creepy ventriloquist's dummy picture *Dead Silence*, and this new haunted house/possessed kid effort hark back to an earlier, more colourful horror-comic sensibility akin to producer William Castle's gimmicky output (*House on Haunted Hill*, *13 Ghosts*, etc). The hook – it's not the house that's haunted, it's the family – has precedents not only in the *Poltergeist* and *Paranormal Activity* sequels but also in *The Entity* (1982), which is amusingly evoked by casting once-haunted leading lady Barbara Hershey as the quivering grandmother.

Nothing in *Insidious* is fresh: the phenomena constitute an anthology of cinema hauntings from Georges Méliès via Shimizu Takashi to Oren Peli (a co-producer), the family dynamic is rote (sceptical dad who has to admit the ghosts are real, mom who believes instinctively but seems like a neurotic, grandparent with a secret), the comedy parapsychologists (Whannell and minor genre icon Lin Shaye) who explain the plot and get in the way, and the scares are kneejerk cheap shocks. The manifestations are also charmingly retro: an oily, fire-faced fiend with clawed hands could have



Breath of stale air: 'Insidious'

come from the 1922 *Häxan*, and there's the full complement of creepy little kids (one jives to Tiny Tim's 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips'), dolls and puppets (the *Saw* signature puppet is glimpsed on a blackboard), spectre brides, domestic murder charades groups, horror haridans, angry ghost thugs, bloody handprints and just-standing-there-in-the-dark-corner presences.

After full-on gothic credits, Wan plays the first act, in a haunted ideal home, almost subtly, evoking the *Grudge* or *Paranormal Activity* films. When the family moves house, however, the film cranks it up to pantomime levels with mostly entertaining, spooky results. The actors are stuck with looking scared

or puzzled, and the wind-up is a predictable Orpheus riff with the shock ending familiar from *Burnt Offerings*, *Count Yorga*, *Vampire* and about a dozen other 1970s pictures, but it's still a scary movie.

♦♦ Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Jason Blum
Steven Schneider
Oren Peli
Written by
Leigh Whannell
Directors of Photography
John R. Leonetti
David M. Brewer
Edited by
James Wan
Kirk Morn
Production Designer
Aaron Sims
Music
Joseph Bishara
Sound Designer
Robert Cross
Costume Designer
Kristin M. Burke
Stunt Co-ordinator
Joel Kramer

CAST

Patrick Wilson
Josh Lambert
Rose Byrne
Renai Lambert
Lin Shaye
Elise Rainier
Ty Simpkins
Dalton Lambert
Barbara Hershey
Lorraine Lambert
Leigh Whannell
Specs
Angus Sampson
Tucker

Andrew Astor
Foster Lambert
Joseph Bishara
insidious entity –
lipstick-face demon
Corbett Tuck
nurse Adele
Heather Tocquigny
nurse Kelly
Ruben Pla
Dr Sercarz

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Limited

Production Companies

An Alliance Films
presentation in
association with ILM
Global of a Haunted
Movies production
A James Wan film
Executive Producer
Brian Kavanaugh-Jones

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

9.198 ft +0 frames

Island

United Kingdom 2010
Directors: Brek Taylor,
Elizabeth Mitchell

Adapted from Jane Rogers's 1999 novel, this first film by writing-directing duo Brek Taylor and Elizabeth Mitchell makes good use of its striking Outer Hebrides settings in a low-key story of an abandoned daughter's intrusion into the lives of a mother and son, isolated on a remote island. After years in care, Nikki (Natalie Press) arrives incognito, with vengeance in mind. The first words are hers, spoken in voiceover: "When I was 29 I decided to kill my mother." A slow-burning psychological drama then unfolds, in which Nikki befriends her gentle half-brother Calum (Colin Morgan) and is beguiled by the beauty of the landscape while grappling with her murderous intentions towards Phyllis (Janet McTeer).

Given the narrative's potentially claustrophobic focus on a trio of secluded characters, the craggy splendour of the setting is used to open the film up. Interior states find analogues in the beautiful but treacherous land and seascapes, as well as through the judicious use of the film's few dwellings. Phyllis, taciturn and unwell, only ventures out to hang washing up to dry, and her house comes to represent her brooding presence, casting a long shadow over the island's inhabitants. Nikki, stumbling through bogs and perilous fogs, thrashes about in the miasma of poisoned emotions her arrival stirs up and has to be rescued by her resourceful half-brother, who is unaware of her true identity. Calum is part nature-boy, an obsessive beachcomber who houses the 'treasures' he gathers from the shore in a shack-like cabinet of curiosities, a garland of washed-up high-heeled shoes hinting at the unconscious fetishism of his collecting.

Effectively a three-hander, *Island* depends on the conviction of its cast's performances to develop tension and credibility, and it's mostly successful in this respect. Press is tightly wound and watchfully feral as Nikki, but as she begins to relax in Calum's company she exudes the wide-blue-eyed waifishness of the young Sissy Spacek. Dialogue is relatively economical and much is communicated through gesture and movement. There's a moment that beautifully conveys the intimacy between mother and son, as well as Nikki's exclusion from it, for it is from her point of view that we see the pair seated at the dinner table, Calum shovelling food boyishly into his mouth under his mother's indulgent gaze, completely content in each other's company. While Press and McTeer are always watchable, it's Colin Morgan's portrayal of Calum that's outstanding. Best known for his role in the BBC series *Merlin*, Morgan reveals himself here as a subtle and commanding film actor. His performance has the calling-card quality of Andrew Garfield's in *Boy A* (2007); expect to see a lot more of him.

SYNOPSIS Twenty-nine-year-old Nikki arrives on a remote Hebridean island and rents a room in an isolated house belonging to a middle-aged woman, Phyllis. Nikki is in fact Susan, the daughter Phyllis abandoned years ago, and she intends to kill her mother. Calum, Phyllis's son from another relationship, shows Nikki around the island and an awkward friendship develops between them. Phyllis tells Nikki that she lives in isolation because her family disowned her when she gave birth to Calum out of wedlock. She also tells her that she had another child, called Susan, who died.

Nikki loses her way in fog and is rescued by Calum. The following day, Nikki takes a poker from the fireplace and approaches Phyllis's room – but the phone rings and interrupts her plan. Calum tells her that his mother tried to kill herself a year ago, at the time of her daughter's birthday. When Nikki returns to the house she finds a cake decorated with the name 'Susan'. Nikki again creeps towards Phyllis's room, armed with a knife, but when confronted by Phyllis she hurriedly conceals the weapon.

When Calum demonstrates his sexual attraction to Nikki, she flees along the beach where she encounters a trio of local lads and a fight ensues in which she is injured. Phyllis gives her notice to leave. Nikki persuades Calum to escape with her to the mainland; they attempt to flee during a storm but their boat capsizes and they are washed up on the island's rocky shore. Nikki confronts Phyllis with her true identity and Phyllis reveals that her brother was Susan's father. Nikki collapses in shock and Calum assaults his mother, accidentally killing her. Calum and Nikki make a pact never to leave each other.

The filmmakers describe *Island* as "a fairytale thriller", a genre mash-up that contains pitfalls the picture doesn't entirely evade. For while Nikki is shown to prefer fairytale logic to facts (somewhat clumsily indicated by her clutching a much annotated copy of *The Arabian Nights*), and Calum is a storehouse of local lore and a Caliban to his mother's Prospero, there's a problem with who is telling the story, and when. Despite Nikki's opening words and the rather routine flashbacks to her years in care, the film doesn't pin down this suggestion of retrospective narration. But perhaps this ambiguity is part of what makes fairytales endure. After all, the stories they tell are as familiar as a warm embrace, when what they conceal is a death-grip. ♦ **Chris Darke**

CREDITS

Produced by
Amy Gardner
Clare Tinsley
Charlotte Wontner
Screenplay
Elizabeth Mitchell
Based on the novel by
Jane Rogers

**Director of
Photography**
Rain Li
Editor
Sam Sneade
Production Designer
Damien Creagh
Original Music
Michael Price

Sound Recordist
Simon Byshe
Costume Designer
Tamar Zaig

CAST

Natalie Press
Nikki Black
Colin Morgan
Calum MacLeod
Janet McTeer
Phyllis Lovage
Tanya Franks
Ruby
Denise Orita
Sally
Kate Stevens
Emma Lacey
Alex Donald
Gerry the barman
Nikki Tangen
young Nikki

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Companies**
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a Nikki Black Films
production in
association with Finite
Films and Tailormade
Productions
Supported by Screen
South and the RIFE
Lottery Funding
Programme

Executive Producers
Anne Sheehan
Martin McCourt
Mark Worrall

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures



Leap for the stars: 'Jig'

Jig

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Sue Bourne
Certificate PG 97m 28s

Jig opens promisingly, with an Irish dancer practising in a square of sunlight on the floor. We enjoy the paradox of a body lighter than air, contrasting with the heavy thud of contact; we are bewitched by the dance's rhythm, faster-than-the-eye leg swings and sudden, disarming stops. It is, however, only here that Sue Bourne's respectful feature documentary reaches beyond the feel of television, with an enticing suggestion of something ancient and almost mysterious abroad in the world.

In exploring international competitive Irish dancing, *Jig* marks a change of gear for Bourne, whose television portfolio most notably involves discovering remarkable stories behind everyday facades (recently, neighbours' lives in *My Street*, or pub-going in *The Red Lion*). Here she enters a world already remarkable, an international community united by jolly costumes, rollmop hairpieces and dazzling choreography. Yet the story she uncovers – that everyone loves dancing and trains hard – is largely mundane.

The film's true revelation, emphatically made, is how international Irish dancing is today, presenting enthusiasts from around

the globe who have qualified for the 2010 world championships in Glasgow. Dedicated parents muse openly about money (a \$2,500 dress worn just four times), the unusual outfits ("I thought we were at a Shirley Temple convention"), or the playground stigma boy dancers face. Bourne coaxes candidness from even the shy children, as when ten-year-old John from Birmingham goes endearingly off-topic to explain where he places his cuddly toys at night.

With a journalistic eye, Bourne captures telling details and facial expressions to bring this world to life, and *Neds* editor Colin Monie stitches them together with real finesse. Yet with so much ground to cover and so many protagonists, and no commentary or name captions, there is a sense of skating over events, and it can be hard simply telling who's who (especially once the girls are wearing their make-up and wigs). The film would surely feel more at home on television, following fewer dancers or spending a series meeting everyone properly.

Jig finally loses its footing during the contest, taking on a shopping-list feel as each dancer competes and awaits judgement. We see little actual dancing here (as, oddly, throughout the film), Bourne strangely preferring the dancers' fixed grimaces or the audience's reactions. After some interminable announcing of the scores, the film ends abruptly on one winner's trophy moment, and it is a shame we hear no



Company of wolves: Natalie Press

afterthoughts on victory or defeat as people head home.

Having piqued our interest, the film sells us short on background context. How and when did Irish dancing sweep the globe? What are the techniques only the best can master? Why the funny wigs? The Russians prove the most philosophical about their obsession: winters are long and "only Irish dancing allows you really to fly". It is plainly a vocation, too, as evidenced by the very inability of most dancers to articulate what exactly it is that makes them roll up the living-room carpet to spend hours practising, or to forgo partying to train all year for a few minutes' shot at championship glory.

Jig is reasonably entertaining, promotes dedication and boasts a beguiling score by Harry Potter composer Patrick Doyle. Yet in Bourne's striving to encompass so much, many participants fail to register, and an opportunity to hear experts expound on their skills is missed. With such a striking artform to illuminate, it's a pity *Jig* focuses more on faces than on feet.

Patrick Fahy

CREDITS

Produced by
Sue Bourne
From an idea by
Julie Heekin
Director of
Photography
Joe Russell
Editor
Colin Monie
Composer/Original
Score Orchestrated
by/Piano
Patrick Doyle
Sound Recordist
Peter Brill

WITH

Brogan McKay
Julia O'Rourke
John Whitehurst
Joe Bitter
Sandun Verschoor
John Carey
Ana Kondr
Simona Mauriello
Claire Greaney
Suzanne Coyle

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Creative Scotland
present in association
with Head Gear
Films/Metrol
Technology a Sue
Bourne film
A Wellpark Scotland
production for BBC
Scotland and Creative
Scotland in association

SYNOPSIS A documentary about international competitive Irish dancing. The film presents dancers, aged from ten to young adult, from Ireland, Britain, New York, Rotterdam and Moscow, all heading to the 40th Irish Dancing World Championships held in Glasgow in March 2010. They, their parents and teachers speak about their devotion to Irish dancing despite the expense of classes, travel and the girls' distinctive wigs and dresses.

At the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, the dancers perform and await the judges' verdict.

Julia's Eyes

Spain/United Kingdom/
France 2009

Director: Guillem Morales

Certificate 15 117m 12s

Produced by Guillermo del Toro and made by many of the same crew who worked on *The Orphanage*, Guillem Morales's second feature – following 2004's critically acclaimed *The Uninvited Guest* – will inevitably call to mind Juan Antonio Bayona's hugely successful and influential 2007 film, especially since it explores similar psychic territory around loss and grief, and shares the same lead actress. This time, Belén Rueda is Julia, an astronomer with the same degenerative eye disease as her recently deceased twin sister Sara. Sensing that Sara's apparent suicide was instead murder, Julia launches herself into an investigation, contrary to the advice of her psychologist husband Isaac (Lluís Homar), who warns that increased stress will hasten her own blindness.

From classic thrillers such as *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1945) and *Wait Until Dark* (1967) to the more melodramatic *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), the horror of going blind, or of being caught in the midst of murderous goings-on, has been the crux of many a film with a female protagonist. Morales builds the suspense in *Julia's Eyes* on this very notion, by milking formulaic horror/thriller tropes, at times nodding to Hitchcock, at others to Italian *giallo*, in a promising first section borne along by the pitch-perfect performances of Rueda and Homar (the latter, of course, also playing a blind man in Almodóvar's *Broken Embraces*, 2009).

Perhaps ironically for a film that deals with blindness, where *Julia's Eyes* really excels is visually. The cinematography is understated yet impeccable, the *mise en scène* richly detailed; cinematographer Oscar Faura's skilful play with light and shadow subtly blurs the image, as if we are seeing (or barely seeing) through Julia's eyes as her sight slowly disappears. It's as though we are suspended in her world, guided only by the characters' voices and fragments of their bodies,



Eyes wide shut: Belén Rueda

principally their hands.

Unfortunately, this subtlety is soon undone by the introduction of crude shocks and jolts, each signalled by an over-boisterous soundtrack. And the film's most obvious gimmick – obscuring the face of Julia's minder Iván every time he is on screen – though intriguing at the start, becomes risible after a while. The same goes for the constant referencing of other films, and the piling up of cliché on cliché; both elements point to the film's most disappointing feature, the story's lack of 'edge'. The limitations of the script – co-written by Morales – become more obvious the longer the film goes on; the mostly feeble plot is stretched out via repetitive or unjustified scenes, often awkwardly connected or lingering too long, delaying the resolution of the narrative until the twists (there are many, all clumsily rushed at the end) are no longer surprising. One twist stands out, however, not only because it feels like a turn of the screw too far but also because it consists of an emotionally selfless gesture on the part of Isaac – presumably a last-ditch attempt to instil a depth that this unsatisfying formal exercise predominantly lacks.

Mar Diestro-Dópido

SYNOPSIS Spain, the present. A young woman named Sara hangs herself, while another person lurks in the background. Sara's body is found by her twin sister Julia and Julia's husband Isaac. Julia suffers from the same eye disease that afflicted Sara. Julia and Isaac are told by the police that Sara committed suicide because she had gone blind after an unsuccessful operation to cure her.

Unconvinced, Julia suspects murder, and begins investigating. She discovers that Sara had a boyfriend, but no one is able to describe him. Isaac tries to stop Julia investigating (since stress worsens the effects of her disease) but eventually agrees to help her acquire a tape of Sara and her boyfriend. Isaac disappears, and is found hanged. Her sight now gone, Julia has the same operation as Sara, after which she must keep her eyes bandaged for a week. She decides to spend the time at her sister's home, looked after by a hospital minder, Iván.

After a series of scares, Iván takes Julia to his flat. Lia, the daughter of Sara's neighbour, tells Julia that Iván murdered her sister. At the risk of losing her sight, Julia removes the bandage and witnesses Iván killing Lia. It transpires that Iván deliberately damaged Sara's eyes, despite a successful operation, so that she would continue to need him. Julia escapes and hides in the house of Sara's blind neighbour Soledad. She is Iván's mother, and has only been pretending to be blind – though Iván injects her with a substance that will blind her. After a struggle, Soledad is killed and Julia stabs Iván. Julia's sight is irreversibly damaged; she looks into her eyes in the mirror one last time, and learns that Isaac was the donor of her corneas.

CREDITS

Produced by
Joaquín Padró
Mar Tagarona
Guillermo del Toro
Mercedes Gamero
Screenplay
Guillem Morales
Enol Paulo
Director of
Photography
Oscar Faura
Editor
Joan Manel Vilaseca
Art Director
Balter Gallart
Music
Fernando Velázquez
Sound Design
Enol Tarragó
Costumes
Maria Reyes

CAST

Belén Rueda
Julia/Sara
Lluís Homar
Isaac
Pablo Derqui
Iván/Ángel
Francesc Orella
Inspector Dimas
Joan Dalmau
Crésulo
Julia Gutiérrez Caba
Soledad
Boris Ruiz
Blasco
Dani Codina
shadow/real Iván
Andrea Hermosa
Lia
Daniel Grao
Dr Román

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Televisión, S.L., A3 Films
Production
Companies
Universal Pictures
International and
Guillermo del Toro
present a Rodar y Rodar
production
In co-production with
Antena 3 Films
In associate production
with Televisió de
Catalunya, S.A.
and the participation of
Mesfilms and Canal +
With the special
participation of
Universal Pictures
International
With the participation of
Antena 3 and the
collaboration of Televisió
de Catalunya, S.A., ICAA
– Instituto de

Cinematografía y Artes
Audiovisuales, ICIC –
Instituto Catalán de las
Industrias Culturales
With financial support
from ICO – Instituto de
Crédito Oficial
With the support of the
MEDIA programme
and the collaboration of
Catalan Films
Executive Producer
for Antena 3 Films:
Ricardo García Arrojo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

10,548 ft +0 frames

Spanish theatrical title
Los ojos de Julia

Life, above All

Germany/South Africa/
Canada/France 2010
Director: Oliver Schmitz
Certificate 12A 105m 38s

In 1988 Oliver Schmitz travelled covertly into a South African township to direct *Mapantsula*, an intimate exploration of life under apartheid which made sure its petty criminal protagonist never stooped to being just a symbol. Twenty years on and Schmitz returns to the same milieu, but this time to confront another of the country's demons – the Aids epidemic. Dedicated to South Africa's 800,000 Aids orphans and dealing with such weighty issues as widespread Aids denial, child prostitution and the difficulty people face getting treatment, *Life, above All* succeeds because Schmitz shoots not from the pulpit but wholly from the perspective of Chanda, a confused 12-year-old forced to grow up early when her mother Lillian falls ill and the superstitious local community starts to eye her family with suspicion.

The story arc – an underdog battling an ignorant community – and the buoyant, rather neat finale may be the stuff of standing ovations and audience awards, but there's subtlety at work here too. The mother-daughter relationship is tenderly portrayed – when the two first embrace, the camera respectfully pulls away, and instead of a soundtrack of wailing violins there's just the murmur of traffic and people in the marketplace. Lerato Mvelase's understated performance ensures that Lillian's struggle for survival has a quiet poignancy to it; indeed, despite the trials and trauma the family faces, for the most part the film doesn't wallow in its own sorrow, earning tears rather than jerking them. It is, though, newcomer Khtomotso Manyake who does the most to banish melodrama and miserablism. She utterly inhabits the character of Chanda, effortlessly switching from soft-spoken and overwhelmed to defiant and mature. Her small, spindly frame infers her young age, but with just a wary glance or questioning stare Manyake lets you know that her character's childhood is well and truly over.

To convey just how pervasive denial about the disease is in Chanda's community, Schmitz lets a whole hour pass before the word 'Aids' is finally uttered. Yet such delicacy isn't so evident in his portrayal of the local community, which ostracises anyone the virus touches. The drama-packed script too easily allows the character of Mrs Tafa, Chanda's overbearing neighbour and the village figurehead, to embody and overemphasise the community's fears. While the support extended to Lillian after her young baby dies at the start of the film is portrayed in detail, when the neighbours finally turn against the family they're sketched too much like an angry mob to convince.

The lyrical style in which Schmitz films his tale does, though, offer some respite. Occasionally visual metaphors

SYNOPSIS Elandsdoorn, South Africa, present day. Twelve-year-old Chanda buys a coffin for her baby sister Sarah. Her mother Lillian is sick, and the money for the funeral has gone. Chanda tracks down her drunken stepfather Jonah to retrieve the money. Neighbour Mrs Tafa tells Chanda she must make it clear that Sarah's death was accidental. Chanda's grandmother – who believes that Lillian's family is cursed – arrives for the funeral, but other family members stay away. Jonah promises he'll look after the family but disappears again with Lillian's money.

Three months later, Chanda shuns her orphaned best friend Esther after the latter suggests that Lillian's sickness is getting worse. Mrs Tafa takes Lillian to a phony doctor. Jonah's sister dumps her ill, drunken brother outside the family's home; he protests to the gathering crowd that there's nothing wrong with him. The neighbours all disown him and he disappears. Chanda tries to apologise to Esther, who has turned to prostitution to support herself. Chanda attempts to persuade Lillian to go to the hospital to see a proper doctor but she refuses. Mrs Tafa arranges for a witch doctor to cleanse the family's house; at the witch doctor's suggestion, Lillian returns to her home village to try to lift the curse.

Mrs Tafa is angered when Chanda allows Esther – who has been badly beaten – to stay with her. Esther admits that she is probably HIV positive; Chanda says it doesn't matter to her. Chanda misses an important exam to look after her family. Her sister Iris disappears; during the search, Jonah's body is found. Chanda realises that his death wasn't accidental, and confronts Mrs Tafa. With the help of Esther's money Chanda tracks down her mother, whose family has abandoned her to die. When she brings her back home, the neighbours attack their house. Mrs Tafa makes it clear that her son didn't die in a burglary as she had previously said, and makes a stand with Chanda, challenging the crowd to welcome the family back, which they do.

are a little overwrought, as when a brewing storm signals the onslaught of trouble for Chanda and her family, but Schmitz avoids dramatic claps and rolls, concentrating instead on everyday details – washing flapping, rubbish flying. Similarly much is made of the contrast between the dark, shadowy family home and the warm light outside, but when the camera does stray beyond the township, it's never allowed to swoon over exotic vistas. It's just a shame that in the dramatic climax such restraint eventually falls away.

♥ Isabel Stevens

CREDITS

Produced by
Oliver Stoltz
Written by
Dennis Foon
Based upon the novel
Chandra's Secrets by
Allan Stratton
**Director of
Photography**
Bernhard Jasper
Edited by
Dirk Grau
Production Designer
Christiane Rothe
Music Composer
Ali N. Askin

Audio Mixer
Ivan Milborrow
Costume Designer
Nadia Kruger

CAST

Khtomotso Manyake
Chanda
Keobaka Mankanyane
Esther
Harriet Manamela
Mrs Tafa
Lerato Mvelase
Lillian
Tinah Mnumzana
Aunt Lizbet

Aubrey Poolo
Jonah
Mapaseka Mathebe
Iris
Thato Kgaladi
Soly
Kgomotso Ditshwene
Dudu
Jerry Marobyane
Mr Photo
Tshepo Emmanuel
Nonyane
Mr Lesole
Johanna Refilwe
Sihlangu
Mrs Lesole

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Companies**
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production with Enigma
Pictures, Senator Film
Produktion, Niama-Film
Funded by Federal
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Culture and the Media
(BKM), Filmstiftung
NRW and MBB –
Medienboard Berlin-
Brandenburg, FFA –
German Federal Film
Board, DFFF – German
Federal Film Fund,
South Africa's
Department of Trade

and Industry (DTI)
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of Téléfilm Canada,
Corus Entertainment,
British Columbia Film
Developed in
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Ateliers du Cinéma
Européen, an initiative
supported by the
MEDIA Programme of
the European
Community
Executive Producer
Helga Sasse

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures Ltd
9507 ft + 0 frames

German theatrical title
Geliebtes Leben

Love like Poison

France 2010
Director: Katell Quillévéré
Certificate 15 85m 11s

The coming-of-age drama has long been regarded as a quintessentially French genre, in no small part because of *The 400 Blows* (1959). But in recent years the format has flourished as a vehicle for female stories, with notable examples coming from Céline Sciamma (*Water Lilies*), Mia Hansen-Love (*All Is Forgiven*) and Isabelle Czapka (*L'Année Suivante*). Catherine Breillat, of course, has provided several caustic fictions testing the format to its limits – beginning with her 1976 debut *A Real Young Girl* – and she in particular has directly confronted taboo in portraying adolescent female sexuality.

Katell Quillévéré's *Love like Poison* – the winner of several prestigious awards including the Prix Jean Vigo for best French debut – is a quiet, introspective film that would seem to have little in common with Breillat's subversive sensibilities. Yet the element of provocation is written plainly in the film's title – the original French means 'A Violent Poison' and comes from a Serge Gainsbourg song identifying love in those terms.

The film depicts a series of rites of passage through which 14-year-old Anna will come to understand the adult life that awaits her – discoveries concerning sex, death and the disappointments that maturity inevitably brings. Her separated parents fight tooth and nail, a situation exacerbated by her mother Jeanne's religious belief and her father Paul's lack of it. Village priest François is a relaxed, serious young man, equally at ease in female company and playing football with the local boys, but he also lives with private agonies of faith; he is troubled by Jeanne's sexuality, and her vulnerable reaching for him, and it's a mark of Quillévéré's subtlety that this theme – like others in the film – is neither resolved nor developed in a conventionally satisfying narrative manner.

Anna's most complex lessons are perhaps learned from grandfather Jean, a pugnacious atheist. Jean is clearly at ease with his life and his infirm body, but mourns his wife and still suffers sexual pangs, which provide some of the film's delicately troubling content. There's an easy rapport between young lead Clara Augarde and the bulky Michel Galabru, but lest this lull us into a feeling of cosiness, Quillévéré gives us a remarkable scene in which Anna, washing Jean, is startled to see him cheerfully sporting an erection. Later, he ruefully tells her he wants, one last time, to see "the place I came from"; Anna runs, realising that he doesn't mean his village, but later obliges his wish by showing him her crotch.

Director/co-writer Quillévéré – in a Breton-set debut which inevitably tempts you to read it as at least partly autobiographical – asks a lot of Augarde, ➤



The long goodbye: Khtomotso Manyake



The awakening: Clara Augarde

both in acting a complex introspective role and in terms of physical exposure, but there's never the slightest suspicion that she is exploiting or compromising the young actress. Rather, Augarde's mixture of confidence and matter-of-fact vulnerability – there's a quiet toughness in those candid Botticelli features – creates an impression of respectful complicity between her and the director.

While French *films de jeunesse* are routinely matter-of-fact in depicting teenage sexuality, there's an unusual tenderness in the scenes between Augarde and Youen Le Boulanger-Gourvil as local choirboy Pierre – partly because of the young actor's eager awkwardness and high-pitched voice, partly because the fact that he's smaller than Augarde gives her an appealing protective dominance in their scenes together.

Quillévére and DP Tom Harari make distinctive use of the Breton terrain, playing up rain-soaked shades of green – in landscapes and even indoors, in the moss invading a damp church. There's also a beautiful cut rhyming a group of hooded, moss-covered saints in a statue with a melancholy François in his rainproof. The casting is distinctive: well-loved veteran Galabru bravely, bullishly, plays a likeable role that unapologetically drifts into a taboo realm of behaviour; Stefano Cassetti makes a quietly sympathetic priest; and the emotional complexities behind Jeanne's forbidding severity are highlighted by the casting of erstwhile Breillat lead Lio.

In its quiet severity and its sensitivity to emotional currents beneath the everyday, *Love like Poison* has a distinct flavour of realism à la Maurice Pialat – and Augarde's may be one of the strongest debuts since Sandrine Bonnaire's in that director's *A nos amours* in 1983. But while Bonnaire's

rebel status was primary in that film, Quillévére and Augarde don't make a big deal of the theme of revolt. What Anna does is simply be herself, go through the growing-up process and quietly establish – by the film's end shot of her confident features – that she's facing a life of her own, even though it's not necessarily going to be any rosier than her parents have known.

◆ Jonathan Romney

CREDITS

Produced by Justin Taurand
Screenplay Katell Quillévére
In collaboration with Mariette Désert
Director of Photography Tom Harari
Editor Thomas Marchand
Art Director Anna Falguères
Original Music Olivier Mellano
Costume Designer Mahemiti Derégnaucourt
Sound Florent Klockenbring

CAST

Clara Augarde
Anna
Lio
Jeanne
Michel Galabru
Jean
Stefano Cassetti
Father François
Thierry Neuvic
Paul
Youen Le Boulanger-Gourvil
Pierre
Philippe Duclos
Evêque
François Bernard
grandfather
Françoise Navarro
grandmother
Catherine Riaux
Louise

Margaux Louineau
Sabine
Hugette Robert
Caroline

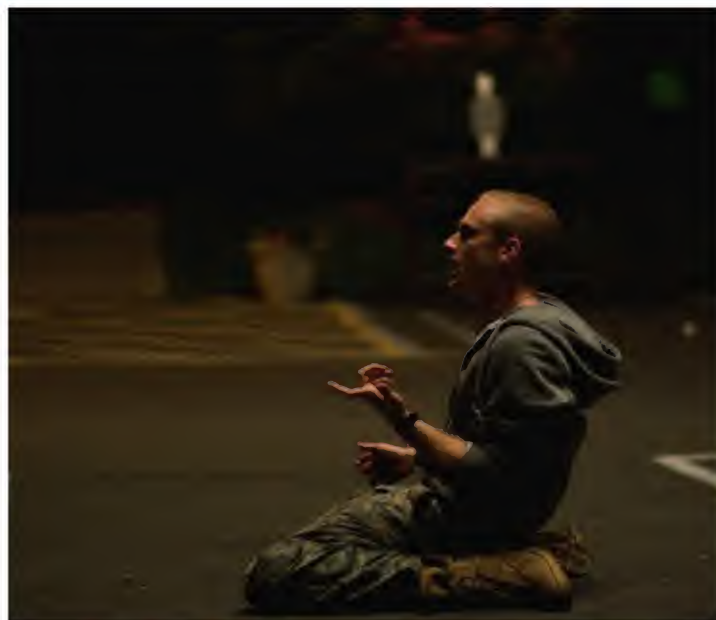
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In association with La Banque Postale Image 3, Cinéimage 4, Lauréate Émergence 2007, Prix du Jury du Prix Junior du Meilleur Scénario 2008

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor Artificial Eye Film Company

7666 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
Un Poison violent



Bearer of bad tidings: Ben Foster

The Messenger

USA/Australia/
British Virgin Islands 2009
Director: Oren Moverman

Although it will doubtless be lumped in with the increasingly extended list of Iraq war films, from *In the Valley of Elah* and *Stop-Loss* to the Jim Sheridan remake of *Brothers*, there's something essentially timeless about this sombre home-front story following the activities of a US army casualty notification team. Based at Fort Dix, New Jersey, these are the soldiers who race to tell families of their bereavement, the unexpected knock on the door presaging a moment of stunned revelation and outpourings of grief and anger. The whys and wherefores of combat may change but one suspects this particular moment of emotional sundering was ever thus, unfolding in privacy well away from the media filter that shapes our perceptions of history.

Writer-director Oren Moverman (who himself saw action with the Israeli Defense Forces in Lebanon) is certainly alert to the dramatic possibilities of this particular situation: as the film's central

duo – Ben Foster's mentally scarred Iraq veteran, serving out the last three months of his tour, and Woody Harrelson's womanising, not-quite-sober career officer – walk up to each doorway, neither we nor they know what's coming next. The scenes have the feel of improv as Moverman's handheld camera captures suburban parents crumpling in wordless pain: a father (Steve Buscemi) exploding in rage that these uniformed flunkies should live while his son has died, a wife (Samantha Morton) whose subdued politeness seems to indicate that she's almost been expecting their visit.

This is vivid and affecting material, though essentially it only gets the film so far. The key notion in Moverman and Alessandro Camon's Oscar-nominated screenplay, however, is to insist that the act of informing the NOK (armyspeak for 'next of kin') is almost as painful for the messengers bearing the bad news as it is for the recipients, because each order fulfilled is another gnawing reminder that they're far away from the real action. Having defined themselves as warriors, the challenge for them now is to find some self-knowledge while redefining their masculinity in terms of caring and compassion. All of which makes for that relative rarity, the hetero male love story, as the two men journey through antipathy, respect, affection,

SYNOPSIS New Jersey, present day. Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery, who was decorated in Iraq, is assigned to spend the last three months of his tour on a casualty notification team with Captain Tony Stone. The latter's rigorously scripted approach to the task of informing loved ones of their loss initially sits uneasily with the more intuitive Will. As the two men bond on the job, it becomes clear that each is dealing with different issues: Will represses anger about his combat experiences; Tony is a recovering alcoholic who has feelings of inadequacy because he didn't see action during his posting in Kuwait. Will is also nursing resentment that his ex-girlfriend Kelly is about to marry another man, yet finds himself drawn to gentle widow Olivia. Will sparks a conflict with Tony by notifying bereaved parents in a grocery store. The rift is healed, however, when the two men go on a fishing trip together, during which Tony starts drinking again and they both turn up the worse for wear at Kelly's wedding reception.

Tony later confesses his demons and Will reveals his guilt over the death of a comrade during a rescue attempt. Will visits Olivia, who's about to move to Louisiana, and agrees to keep in touch.

SYNOPSIS The Breton countryside, the present. Fourteen-year-old Anna has returned from boarding school to stay at the house of her ailing paternal grandfather Jean; her mother Jeanne lives there following a separation from husband Paul. Anna is soon due for confirmation and receives instruction from François, the young village priest. Anna attends her first funeral, and faints. She spends time with choirboy Pierre, with whom she begins tentative sexual explorations. Jeanne, an observant Catholic, is suffering from depression and is attracted to François, whose own feelings cause him anguish. Paul visits but argues with Jeanne. Anna attends her confirmation and again faints; Jeanne angrily accuses her of pretending. Anna exposes herself to her grandfather, following his wishes. After his death, she recites a sexually charged lyric at his funeral. She returns to the village to see Pierre.

illicit drunkenness and fisticuffs to the place where they can finally open up to one another.

Foster's buttoned-down intensity and Harrelson's chastened volubility play well off each other, and there's a definite sense of characters who have authentic lives rather than just a series of plot-points to deliver. By drawing us into their complex humanity, the film succeeds in cutting through any preconceptions and prejudices we might have, allowing us to see them as people rather than just soldiers – it's perhaps a backhanded tribute to say that it does so without really putting pedal to the metal in terms of ramping up a dramatic narrative. A subplot setting up a romantic involvement between Foster and stoic widow Morton looks as though it might supply some fire but it soon becomes obvious that the writers (unlike, say, Jim Sheridan's *Brothers*) are interested more in people and issues than in melodrama, so this element is left on a surprisingly gentle simmer, even though Morton is so completely immersed in her role you wish she was given more to do.

Which pretty much leaves *The Messenger* coasting for its second half, as Foster and Harrelson carouse, bristle and bond their way towards the telling final-reel revelations. The not unexpected baring of souls feels more like a scripted set piece than anything else in the movie but we accept it as a perhaps necessary construct to set these two troubled individuals on a sounder footing as they face the next chapter in their lives. The subdued nature of Moverman's onscreen resolution offers a strong hint that he'd prefer viewers to continue the story for themselves, and thankfully this sensitive, honourable, imperfect movie is immersive enough for us to feel the inclination to do so.

➤ **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Produced by
Mark Gordon
Lawrence Inglee
Zach Miller
Written by
Alessandro Camron
Oren Moverman
Director of Photography
Bobby Bukowski
Editor
Alex Hall
Production Designer
Stephen Bealrice
Original Music
Nathan Larson
Production Sound Mixer
Ken Ishii
Costume Designer
Catherine George

CAST

Ben Foster
Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery
Woody Harrelson
Captain Tony Stone
Samantha Morton
Olivia Pitterson
Jena Malone
Kelly
Steve Buscemi
Dale Martin
Eamonn Walker
Colonel Stuart Dorsett
Yaya DaCosta
Monica Washington

Portia
Mrs Burrell
Lisa Joyce
Emily
Peter Francis James
Dr Grosso

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Production Companies
Omnilab Media Group
presents in association with Shereazade Film Development Co. Ltd. and BZ Entertainment a Mark Gordon Company/GOOD
Executive Producers
Ben Goldhirsh
Christopher Mapp
Matthew Street
David Whealy
Glenn Stewart
Steffen Aumuller
Claus Clausen
Bryan Zuriff
Shaun Redick

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
The Works UK
Distribution Ltd.

My Dog Tulip

USA 2009

Director: Paul Fierlinger

"Unable to love each other, the British turn naturally to dogs," opines the tart and apposite opening inscription on this wry, delightful and supremely scatological animated feature, adapted from J.R. Ackerley's fond 1956 memoir of his life with Tulip, a noisy and neurotic Alsatian bitch. Few can ever have turned as completely as Ackerley, making *My Dog Tulip* one of cinema's odder love stories, but animator Paul Fierlinger's masterly adaptation gives it an enviable imaginative fluidity. His earlier canine-crammed autobiographical short *Still Life with Animated Dogs* (2001) displayed a similar interest in a dog's invaluable emotional role, but this first feature invests Ackerley's prose with verve and visual playfulness, bringing that engaging work bounding to life while maintaining a strong authorial signature of its own.

Where Sylvain Chomet's *The Illusionist* (2010) submerged Jacques Tati's script in wistful sentimentality, here Fierlinger's mobile, unruly animation catches the shrewd, observational humour of the original memoir and extends it adroitly. The film makes extensive use of Ackerley's own words – most of the script seems to be a straight lift from the book – and reproduces his grey post-war London while tinting it in autumnal hues (the overcast English palette is provided by Sandra Fierlinger).

With one foot in realism, where both the tweedy, bespectacled Ackerley and the glossy, frisky Tulip resemble their real-life selves, the film gives itself licence to morph happily into

SYNOPSIS London, 1946. Middle-aged writer J.R. Ackerley acquires excitable Alsatian bitch Tulip from her first, unhappy home, and they bond instantly. He is fascinated by her excitable obsession with him, and muses about her excretory routines. She is the 'Ideal Friend' that he has long sought. Ackerley's sister Nancy moves in and tries fruitlessly to steal Tulip's affection. On a visit to indolent friend Pugh in the country, Tulip defecates in the bedroom and disgraces them. Ackerley tries to mate her with Max, a suitable Alsatian, but she fights with him, and only befriends Chum, her next mate. After repeated failures, Ackerley takes Tulip to Suffolk to mate with the reportedly perfect Mountjoy. Mountjoy fails to mount her due to congenital medical problems. She is impregnated that night by the ragamuffin dog next door. Tulip whelps eight puppies. Finding himself unable to drown them, Ackerley gives them away. He and Tulip live happily together for 15 years, his life transformed by her devotion.

several linked but different animation styles, varying according to the content of the narration. Direct retellings have finished, period-watercolour rendering, edging into starker black-and-white cartoons or line art for flashbacks or daydreams and, most audaciously, a set of fantastic, yellow-pad pencil scribbles in which a fierce, befrocked Tulip acts out a fantasy life. These visual shifts give the agreeable impression that the film is being produced by hand as the story unfolds. Which of course it was, since Fierlinger hand-animated it himself using TVPaint software to create nearly 60,000 drawings – it's paperless animation which nonetheless has a signature, hand-drawn feel.

This shifting set of graphic concepts makes *My Dog Tulip*'s animation as springy, sly and wide-ranging as its narration, providing a useful counterweight to the slightness of the story. At heart it's a romance (the opening rescue scenes, in which the poorly reared Tulip repays lonely Ackerley's tenderness with an obsessive devotion, are very touching) but one told as a winding series of observations, delivered in Proustian detail, about Tulip's essential – and to Ackerley entirely adorable – doggishness.

The plot, such as it is, covers a string

of failures, as Tulip's master attempts to find a vet who can tolerate her aggression, and a mate who can give her the pups that he, her true love, feels she deserves. Fierlinger gives these interludes a whimsical comic rendering, which leaps into eccentric James Thurber-styled fantasy as Ackerley muses on a couple's sex life, or sees a motorbike sidecar mutate into imaginary stocks as Tulip disgraces herself on an outing to the country. The combination of Christopher Plummer's fruity narration, Ackerley's fastidious prose and his detailed obsession with Tulip's scatological and sexual life is very funny indeed ("Dogs read the world through their nose, and write their history in urine"). But Fierlinger's dog-mess-dotted scenes seem over-reliant on this incongruity for comic effect.

It's only the film's very end that reveals the chagrin under the amusing misanthropy, the poignancy within Ackerley's knowing tone. Tulip, who drove his human friends away, is the 'Ideal Friend' that he had despaired of finding in life. *My Dog Tulip*, while hymning their charming, cross-species bond, turns out to be clear-eyed about the high price that Ackerley paid for four-legged love.

➤ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Norman Twain
Howard Kaminsky
Frank Pellegrino
Screenplay
Paul Fierlinger
Based on the novel by J.R. Ackerley
Art/Graphic Design
Paul Fierlinger
Sandra Fierlinger
Sound Design
John Avarese
Music
John Avarese
Animated by
Paul Fierlinger
Animation Studio
AR&T Associates, Inc.

VOICE CAST

Christopher Plummer
J.R. Ackerley
Lynn Redgrave
Nancy/the green grocer's wife
Isabella Rossellini
Miss Canvanini, veterinarian
Bryan Murray
Captain Pugh/Mr Blandish
Peter Gerety
Mr Plum/Colonel Finch/pugilist
Paul Hecht
army vet
Euan Morton
bicyclist/rude vet

©The My Dog Tulip Company, LLC
Production Companies
A film by Paul and Sandra Fierlinger
Pennsylvania Film Commission

Dolby Digital In Colour
[1.66:1]

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited



My wife as a dog: 'My Dog Tulip'

Outside the Law

France/Algeria/Belgium/
Tunisia/Italy 2010

Director: Rachid Bouchareb

Certificate 15 138m 32s

When someone is unprepared to listen to reason, what's the best way to get one's message across? That's the well-worn question facing three Algerian brothers in Rachid Bouchareb's *Outside the Law*. For middle child Abdelkader, the answer lies in violence: a terrorist campaign against the French government that has colonised his country, marginalised its indigenous people and seized their land. Reluctant but resigned Messaoud, former soldier, goes along with him. But the runt of the litter, Saïd, sees things differently. Not everyone can be a resistance fighter, he argues; he prefers to fight (quite literally) from the inside out, by training an Algerian boxer to become French national champion, thus forcing the nation to sit up and pay attention to his countrymen. To his brothers, he's a sell-out, but Saïd will be the last man standing by the time their story reaches its end.

While Bouchareb is too sophisticated a filmmaker to come down on either side of the argument, one can't help but suspect that his sympathies lie with the youngest of the brothers. As a filmmaker concerned with bringing to light the west's colonialist past – and for the matter, its legacy – he is faced with much the same problem as his three heroes. On the one hand, do you explore western cinematic conventions (as so much Latin American cinema of the 1960s did) to make your political point through film form itself, but in doing so run the risk of alienating audiences? Or do you attempt to talk to the west in its own language, aping its storytelling structures in order to reach the widest possible audience?

On the evidence of both this film and 2006's *Days of Glory*, which left off where this film picks up, Bouchareb falls firmly on the latter side of the fence. While the earlier work brought the plight of WWII's Algerian troops to international attention by passing itself



Hard cell: Sami Bouajila

off as a war movie, *Outside the Law* looks to the gangster flick and film noir to shape his account of Franco-Algerian conflict. The obvious intertext is Jean-Pierre Melville's resistance drama *Army of Shadows* (1969), but there are also gestures here to countless Hollywood classics. The tilted trillies, murky morals and sleazy settings (from Pigalle bars to Nanterre's labyrinthine shantytowns) evoke the atmosphere of *Touch of Evil* (1958); the constant framing of the three maverick men in silhouette through doorways and windows calls to mind the iconography of John Ford's westerns. Scorsese is here, in the epic rise and bloody fall of these young, ambitious men, and in the allusions, through the boxing theme, to *Raging Bull* (1980). There's even a touch of Tarantino (or should that be Sergio Leone?) in the prologue, which sees an officious agent shatter a rural idyll, setting up what is to all intents and purposes a revenge narrative.

Bouchareb is a fine mimic: there are some standout sequences here (the intercutting of a looming police force

with a joyous family wedding party is a highlight). And if there's an inherent conservatism to his style, it seems to be born not of hypocrisy but of pragmatism, the rationale being that you shouldn't need an intimate knowledge of French history to be caught up in *Outside the Law*'s epic sweep.

But while you shouldn't, you do, for there's a fundamental problem of pacing here. Amid the glut of other cinematic reference points, Bouchareb would have done well to look to Jean-François Richet's recent *Mesrine*, and in particular its director's decision to split the film in two. With a 40-year span and three protagonists to follow, the director struggles: events are piled one upon another too thickly to be tangible, and what should be a devastating conclusion comes both too suddenly and not soon enough. In seeking an answer to that all-important question, Bouchareb may have found the right strategy for getting his message across, but in this case, sadly, the execution is lacking. ♦ Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producer
Jean Bréhat
Screenplay/Dialogue
Olivier Lorelle
Rachid Bouchareb
Director of Photography
Christophe Beaucarne
Editor
Yannick Kergoat
Art Director
Yan Arlaud
Original Music
Composed,
Conducted and
Arranged by
Armand Amar
Sound
Marc Engels
Philippe Penot
Olivier Walczak
Frank Rubio
Thomas Gauder
Costume Designers
Edith Vespérini

Stephan Rollot
Stunt Co-ordinator
Gaëlle Cohen

CAST

Jamel Debbouze
Saïd
Roschdy Zem
Messaoud
Sami Bouajila
Abdelkader
Chafia Boudraa
mother
Bernard Blancan
Faivre
Sabrina Seyvecou
Hélène
Assaad Bouab
Ali
Thibault De Montalembert
Morvan
Samir Guesmi
Otmami
Jean-Pierre Lorit
Picot

Ahmed Benaïssa
father

©Tessalit Productions,
AARC, EPTV, Tassili
Films, StudioCanal,
France 2 Cinéma,
France 3 Cinéma,
Kissfilms Productions,
Novak Prod, RTBF,
Empire Productions
Production Companies
Jean Bréhat and Rachid
Bouchareb present a
co-production of AARC
– Agence Algérienne
pour le Rayonnement
Culturel, EPTV
Télévision Algérienne,
Tassili Films, Tessalit
Productions,
StudioCanal, France 2
Cinéma, France 3
Cinéma, Kissfilms,
Novak Prod, RTBF
Télévision belge, Quinta
Communications and
Eagle Pictures
With the support of
Centre National
d'Études et de
Recherche sur le
Mouvement National et
la Révolution du 1er
Novembre 54 (Ministère
Algérien de la Culture)
With the assistance of
Sonatrach, Sonelgaz,
ONDA – Office National
algérien des Droits
d'Auteur, ONCI – Office
National algérien de la
Culture et de
l'Information
With the participation of
CNC – Centre National
de la Cinématographie
et de l'Image Animée
With the support of
ACSE – Fonds Images
de la Diversité, Région
Provence Alpes Côte
d'Azur, Quinta Studio
Tunis
In association with
Colinova 6, Cinéma 4,
A Plus Image, Uni Etoile
7, Motion Investment
Group
With the participation of
Canal +, CinéCinéma,
Canal + Horizons and

France Télévisions
A film by Rachid
Bouchareb
With the participation of
RATP
Produced by Tessalit
Productions
Executive Producer
Muriel Merlin

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
ICO/Optimum
Releasing

12,468 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
Hors-la-loi

SYNOPSIS Algeria, 1925. Brothers Messaoud, Abdelkader and Saïd are evicted from their family's land when it is seized by the French government. Twenty years later, Messaoud is a soldier in the French army. After Abdelkader is arrested during riots in 1945 and sent to prison in France, Saïd and his mother follow him there. In 1955 they are living in a shanty camp in Nanterre. Saïd has taken up with a pimp, while Abdelkader and Messaoud work in the Renault factory. Abdelkader's time in jail has only strengthened his commitment to the Algerian Liberation movement, the FLN. He enlists Messaoud, and the two become key members of the resistance, eventually turning to murder. Tensions arise when Saïd refuses to support the cause, preferring to invest his energies in his business career. Time passes. Saïd opens a nightclub and moves into boxing promotion; Abdelkader and a reluctant Messaoud become further entrenched in the FLN. A special task force, the Red Hand, led by policeman Faivre, is closing in on the brothers, resulting in a shootout in which Messaoud is killed; Abdelkader is saved at the last minute by Saïd. In retaliation, the Red Hand stake out a boxing match in which Saïd's prize fighter, an Algerian, is set to become French champion. Fearing for his brother's life, Abdelkader begs him to call off the fight. The two brothers flee, but as they escape they are caught up in a vicious riot between a group of Algerians and the police. Abdelkader is shot and killed. Faivre tells Saïd that the Algerians have won.

Le quattro volte

Italy/Germany/Switzerland 2010
Director: Michelangelo Frammartino

Michelangelo Frammartino says that every director – a species prone to hubris issues – should film a goat, in which pursuit, “There’s no question who’s in control: not you.” It’s hard to believe, though, that many filmmakers could elicit – by whatever stroke of luck, skill or sheer dogged perseverance – a caprine portrait simultaneously as lucid and gnostic, not to mention comical and captivating, as *Le quattro volte*, surely the *Au Hasard Balthazar* of goat movies. Like Robert Bresson’s masterly 1966 fable of a donkey’s mute testament to human follies, Frammartino’s film stands aside from teleological character drama, thanks both to its narrative relay structure – passing the baton of ‘subject’ from an old goatherd to one of his young charges, a seemingly indomitable hilltop fir and finally its cindered remains – and to a directing philosophy that favours the study of physical rituals over psychological declarations, and the identification of ineffable mysteries over narrative conflict.

For habitués of modern ‘slow’ art cinema, this *mise en scène* should seem less idiosyncratic than did Bresson’s mode in his time. Indeed, Frammartino’s documentary-style description of rural Calabria assumes the condition of pure observation, in so far as the film indexes a landscape and way of life in which the director is thoroughly steeped (through both his family roots and the time he spent imbibing locations). At the same time, it’s apparent that the film’s scenes are staged for subtle narrative development, even before the eight-minute, single-shot *pièce de résistance* in which the goatherd’s dog attempts to direct villagers to his master’s sickbed but instead has to resort to dispatching a mass of goats into the emptied village. This amazing, casually surreal scene starts with Roman centurions pulling into the village in a red timber truck – they’re dressed for an Easter Passion parade somewhere down the road – ends with the goats ascendant and ubiquitous, and in between sees the dog deploy a Heath Robinson-esque understanding of gravity to unleash the forces of creative destruction.

There’s a similar flair for the slow-burn gag, combined with a pantheist sense of the rule of nature, in the scene setting up the goatherd’s death some



The goat that rocked: ‘Le Quattro Volte’

screen minutes before. Framed in close-up between sheaves of wheat in a field, he initially seems lost deep in thought, before an ant crawls across his face: roused, he pulls up his trousers and walks off, accidentally leaving on the ground behind him his packet of medicinal church dust, with which he treats his cough each night. (Not that the film embraces the goatherd’s superstition about the medicine; it also notes that, when he discovers his loss that night, he goes scampering off in the cold in a futile bid to buy more holy soot.) The follow-up shot sees a woman’s face staring out of the torn magazine paper, lost in time, as ants crawl – triumphant? – all over the spilt dust.

As it turns out, while the film’s protagonist is a variable role, the ant seems to be a consistent antagonist: it also makes its way across the faces of the kid goat and the fir tree before they meet their maker. Man (the featured village is perched stunningly atop a vertiginous cliff), goat (which we see climbing tables, breeze blocks, road walls and mountaintops) and tree each takes its turn in the ascendant, making its bid for the high ground, but they finally join the ants and the dust, with which the film begins and ends. The primeval, fuming landscape of the local *scarazzi* – hemispherical furnaces of compacted straw and ash which cook wood to charcoal – lends *Le quattro volte* a wryly metaphorical beginning-and-end-of-the-world quality to go with its ethnographic point of interest.

The film’s title (‘the four times’, ‘turns’ or ‘phases’) references local sage Pythagoras, whose upbeat ideas about the transmigration of the soul – which could occupy human, animal,

vegetable or mineral form – offer one interpretation of the glue between the film’s four sections. It’s also reminiscent of a James Benning film title (*11x14, 13 Lakes, Ten Skies*), as are the black-screen interludes between chapters and the feeling for a timescale above and probably beyond the human. Indeed, in its sense of species equality and asceticism, in its mathematical underpinnings, harmonies and holism, *Le quattro volte* could almost be a manifesto for the Pythagorean school. Not that there’s anything forced about its theory; if you can separate yourself from the buzz of higher-pitch cinema, the film’s beauty, wit and charm come as a breath of fresh air. ➡ Nick Bradshaw

CREDITS

Produced by
Marta Donzelli
Gregorio Paonessa
Susanne Manan
Philippe Bober
Gabriella Manfrè
Elda Guidinetti
Andres Pfaffli
Producer
Francesca Zanza
Written by
Michelangelo Frammartino
Photography
Andrea Locatelli
Editors
Benni Atria
Maurizio Grillo
Sound
Paolo Benvenuti
Simone Paolo Olivero
Costumes
Gabriella Maiolo

CAST

Giuseppe Fuda
old shepherd
Nazareno Timpano
Bruno Timpano
Artemio Vellone
Serra San Bruno
charcoal miners
Domenico Cavallo
Santo Cavallo
Peppe Cavallo
shepherds
Isidoro Chiera
priest
Iolanda Manno
priest’s housekeeper
Cesare Ritorito
altar boy

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Production Companies

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With the participation of MBB – Medienboard Berlin – Brandenburg, Fondazione Calabria Film Commission, Regione Calabria in collaboration with ZDF/ARTE, Cinecittà Luce, RSI Televisione Svizzera
In collaboration with Roma Lazio Film Commission and CRC – Capital Regions for Cinema
With the support of Comune di Serra San Bruno

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
New Wave Films

Rio

USA 2011
Director: Carlos Saldanha
Certificate U 95m 49s

In the 1940s, the Walt Disney studio made two live-action/cartoon feature films to celebrate the wonders of South America. *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* were supported by the US government as part of its ‘Good Neighbor’ policy to keep fascism out of the region, though the films are little remembered today. *Rio*, though, is home territory for its Brazilian director Carlos Saldanha, who has credits on *Ice Age* (2002) and most of the other films at the Blue Sky animation studio.

Rio is presented with the sunny panache and colourful detail that viewers expect from a 3D CGI cartoon – and this is especially true of the Brazilian birdlife and a cast-of-thousands carnival. Ironically, however, this animated *Rio* still feels like a travelogue, less tangible and lived-in than the Edinburgh of last year’s hand-drawn *The Illusionist* – though in fairness, this reflects on mainstream formulas rather than the computer medium. And while *Rio* acknowledges the city’s underclass (vibrantly and violently depicted in *City of God* in 2002) through the character of a little boy thief who’s a homeless orphan camping on a corrugated metal rooftop, it does so little with him that he feels tokenistic, while the city itself comes across merely as a nice place to visit.

The story is one that parents of young children should recognise from computer cartoons such as *Madagascar* (2005) and *Open Season* (2006): once again, a domesticated creature – this time a blue macaw, voiced by Jesse Eisenberg – is faced with the frightening wild, made more palatable by the company of a feisty female (voiced by Anne Hathaway). The birds spend much of the film chained together at the claw, like the fugitives in *The 39 Steps* (1935). Unfortunately, Eisenberg’s bird has never learned to fly, which leads to a lively routine when the pair try taking off from a mountain. The film takes cues from Disney fare such as *The Aristocats* (1970), with its slapstick action and song-and-dance numbers, while some downhill road chases are reminiscent of 2007 Oscar-nominated short *Oktapodi*, though never quite as funny and furious.

Rio is more conservative and predictable than Blue Sky films such as *Robots* (2005) or *Horton Hears a Who!* (2008), but it has more to like than either of those. The macaws are a pleasant comedy twosome, even if the mammoth couple in the *Ice Age* sequels have more chemistry and the bond between Eisenberg’s macaw and his woman owner is stronger than the bird romance. More seriously, no character in the film truly shines, and the adventure lacks momentum. This is partly because of some jarringly placed song numbers; you can see how they *theoretically* advance the film but they still feel intrusive.

The humour involving the humans is

SYNOPSIS Calabria, the timeless present. Smoke smoulders from a scarazzo (charcoal kiln). The beat of a spade compacting its side resounds up into the hills along with a chorus of goat bells. The aged, ailing goatherd medicates himself with a solution of dust bought from the local church; the morning after letting slip his packet of dust-medicine in a field (and failing to gain entry to the church for a replacement) he dies in his bed, surrounded by his goats. The camera is interred with his coffin.

After a pause, the film resumes with the birth of a kid goat, and sketches its development until it is sent out into the world with the herd; lost, it wanders the hillside and settles into the nook of a fir tree. After another pause, the film considers the tree through the seasons; it is felled, shaved, re-erected in the village for a festival, then chopped into logs and entombed in another scarazzo.

SYNOPSIS Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A baby macaw is captured by smugglers for sale abroad. The macaw falls from a lorry in a Minnesota town, where he's found by a girl, Linda. The two grow up to be soulmates. The macaw, Blu, is blissfully happy in domesticity, with no idea how to live in the wild.

One day, Brazilian ornithologist Tulio visits. He explains that Blu's species is endangered. To save it, Blu must mate with a female macaw in captivity. Reluctantly, Linda agrees and accompanies Blu to Rio. Blu is introduced to the female bird, Jewel; she's beautiful, but interested only in escape. The two macaws are stolen by Fernando, a homeless boy working for a bird-smuggling gang.

The birds escape but are chained together. Worse, Blu doesn't know how to fly. In the jungle, they meet a toucan, Rafael, who takes them to meet a friend called Luiz. After being chased by malevolent cockatoo Nigel and his gang of monkeys, the birds eventually find Luiz, a bulldog, who cuts their chain with a buzzsaw.

Blu still can't fly and says a sullen goodbye to Jewel. She is captured by Nigel, who uses her to snare Blu too. Linda and Tulio, alerted by a repentant Fernando, give chase but the smugglers take off in a plane. The birds free themselves but Jewel's wing is injured when Nigel attacks, and she falls from the plane. Blu's avian instincts are awakened and he flies them to safety.

Linda stays with Tulio in the jungle above Rio, where Blu and Jewel raise their young.

almost as broad as the bird gags, as if out of fear that a story with animal-trafficking gangsters might alarm children. In marketing speak, *Rio* skews younger than the likes of *Toy Story 3* or *How to Train Your Dragon* (both last year), which doesn't preclude a healthy box office for the film.

◆ **Andrew Osmond**

CREDITS

Produced by

Bruce Anderson

John C. Donkin

Screenplay

Don Rhymer

Joshua Sternin

Jeffrey Ventimilia

Sam Harper

Story

Carlos Saldanha

Earl Richey Jones

Todd Jones

Cinematographer

Renato Falcão

Edited by

Harry Hiner

Music

John Powell

Supervising Sound Designer

Randy Thom

Supervising Animator

Galen Tan Chu

VOICE CAST

Anne Hathaway

Jewel

Jesse Eisenberg

Blu

Jemaine Clement

Nigel

Leslie Mann

Linda

Tracy Morgan

Luiz

will.i.am

Pedro

Rodrigo Santoro

Tulio

George Lopez

Rafael

Jamie Foxx

Nico

Jake T. Austin

Fernando

Jane Lynch

Alice, the other goose

Wanda Sykes

Chloe, the goose

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and Spain)

Production Companies

Twentieth Century Fox

Animation presents a

Blue Sky Studios

production

Executive Producer

Chris Wedel

In Colour

Prints by

DeLuxe

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

Some screenings

presented in 3D

8,623 ft +8 frames

Rio Breaks

USA/Italy 2009

Director: Justin Mitchell

Certificate 12A 84m 55s

Justin Mitchell's film lucidly illustrates the advantages and pitfalls of the observational documentary. The prospect of capturing what could be a transitional moment for two surfing-mad favela kids in Rio de Janeiro certainly presents an opportunity to record authentic life-changing moments before our very eyes. Indeed, from Steve James's celluloid landmark *Hoop Dreams* (1994) to more recent offerings such as Andrew Lang's boxing-themed *Sons of Cuba* (2009), the combination of sport and social study has provided readymade structure and a certain thematic weight, while also of course allowing the filmmakers to spend time with their subjects and gain their confidence.

It's safe to assume that similar calculations were operating here, yet in the event the story of wide-eyed, photogenic Fabio and Naama – caught between boyhood and adolescence, between dreams of surfing success and the brutal realities of the slums – essentially evades the camera. Voiceover fills us in on the set-up but the next 85 minutes or so prove an intermittently illuminating, largely frustrating experience – we want to see the drama unfolding but mostly we get told about it afterwards. Mitchell and his camera can't be everywhere, but whether through bad luck or bad judgement, sundry key events take place off screen.

That's not to say there aren't striking moments. It's an indication of how far camera technology has moved on that a relatively modest production such as this can present images of startling luminosity, following the kids into the water and on to their surfboards as the sun pours down on Copacabana. This utterly idyllic footage makes a telling contrast to the hardscrabble conditions up the slopes in the favelas, where the boys live in a neighbourhood with such a high mortality rate it's dubbed 'Vietnam'. No wonder Naama smiles when he suggests that the crew are scared even to be there. Some of the film's more piercing moments occur when this prematurely old soul is opening up for the camera, superficial bravado fading away to reveal a

childhood dominated by fear in the present and anxiety for the future.

To be fair, Mitchell has enough rapport to stop this material seeming unduly exploitative, but it was obviously tougher making contact with the volatile Fabio, whose mood swings and inexplicable outbursts of aggression make him an altogether more troubling screen presence. The film puts us into the company of kids who keep to their own path and (beyond the expected horseplay) don't seem unduly distracted by the documentary process. Fabio pretty much going AWOL when the story should be drawing its conclusions therefore has a certain authentic integrity – but it doesn't make for especially satisfying viewing.

Fascinating to learn from the film's website that Naama has since been taken up by a top Brazilian TV show host, who's bought the family a new apartment in Copacabana, pumped funds into the Favela Surf Club, and flown Naama to Hawaii to meet surfing superstar Kelly Slater. None of this is on screen in *Rio Breaks*, though, which heightens one's sense of the film as a cautionary example of what can go awry when reality won't quite perform for the lens.

◆ **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Producers

Vince Medeiros

Justin Mitchell

Written by

Vince Medeiros

Justin Mitchell

Co-writer

John Maier

Cinematographer

Justin Mitchell

Editors

René Guerra

Justin Mitchell

Music Composed by

Jeff Kite

Sound

Anderson Ferreira

WITH

Fabio da Costa

Saldanha

Naama de Araújo

Martines Uzêda

Rogério Silva de

Oliveira

Pixico

Maicon Martins dos

Santos

Kevin da Cunha Dios

Jean Carlos Rodrigues

Pires

Simão Romão da Silva

Fabiano da Silva

Pereira (Bicudo)

Lidia de Carvalho Cruz

(Fia)

Anderson Carvalho

Basto da Silva

(Picachu)

Joyce Rocha de

Oliveira

narrated by

Bodie Olmos

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Production Companies

The Breadcrumb Trail

presents in association

with Forward

Entertainment, Prodigio

Films

Produced in association

with Sundance Channel

Executive Producers

Francesco Civita

Sheri Levine

Michael Thornton

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[L78:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Mr Bongo Films

7,642 ft +8 frames



Earning his wings: 'Rio'

The Roommate

USA 2011

Director: Christian E. Christiansen
Certificate 15 91m 8s

A bargain-basement pseudo-horror film, *The Roommate* boasts precisely two shocks, both thanks to the usual noise jolts. The rest of this campus *Single White Female* redux kills time in anaemic manner. Fashion student Sara (Minka Kelly) arrives at the fictional University of Los Angeles with her lip gloss at the ready and dreams of a future in fashion. Her roommate Rebecca (Leighton Meester) gives every indication of being a pain, responding furiously whenever her calls aren't immediately answered. After questioning Sara's choice of *The Devil Wears Prada* as her favourite movie because it's "not a classic", she creepily buys her a poster of the film.

That kind of shorthand pits Sara – a native of Des Moines, Iowa, a prototypically innocuous and wholesome site of Midwestern niceness – against Rebecca, a neurotic rich girl from Beverly Hills with snobbier tastes (a logical extension of Meester's long-running role on *Gossip Girl*). Rebecca takes Sara to a contemporary art museum, where she admires Richard Prince's *Sonic Nurse* (used recently as cover art by Sonic Youth for their album of the same name). That kind of snottiness is film shorthand for dangerously unhinged behaviour, which Rebecca soon begins to display. Perky Sara fails repeatedly to pick up on the obvious warning signs – demonstrating a dangerously naive frame of mind for any attractive young woman hellbent on breaking into the rapacious fashion industry.

The Roommate does nothing with this reductive clash of cultural values; instead, it's crazy bitch versus nice girl all over again. With only two (theoretically) tense set pieces, much time is spent fetishising the uniformly alluring cast. Nothing in the film makes more of an impression than the attention paid to lip gloss, especially in an absurd series of close-ups dissolving between Sara getting it on with her boyfriend and Rebecca engaging in phone sex with Sara's ex. Even that's not as lurid as it should be: this is one tepid



Fashion queen: Minka Kelly

teen-aimed film that can't even work up the energy to tease with violence or the hint of sexual danger. It's a seriously bad sign when the most interesting performance in a film comes from Billy Zane, camping it up as ever as Sara's lecherous professor.

♦♦ Vadim Rizov

CREDITS

Produced by
Doug Davison
Roy Lee
Written by
Sonny Mallhi
Director of Photography
Phil Parniet
Editor
Randy Bricker
Production Designer
Jon Gary Steele
Music
John Frizzell
Production Mixer
Richard B. Goodman
Costume Designer
Maya Lieberman
Stunt Co-ordinator
Lance Gilbert

CAST

Leighton Meester
Rebecca
Minka Kelly
Sara Matthews
Cam Gigandet
Stephen
Aly Michalka
Tracy
Danneel Harris
Irene

Frances Fisher
Rebecca's mom
Tomas Arana
Rebecca's dad
Billy Zane
Professor Roberts
Nina Dobrev
Maria
Matt Lanter
Jason
Katerina Graham
Kim

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Production Company
A Vertigo Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Beau Marks
Sonny Mallhi

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDSS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

8,201 ft +10 frames

A Screaming Man

France/Chad/Belgium/
Cameroon/Burkina Faso/
The Netherlands 2010

Director: Mahamat-Saleh Haroun

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a major plot twist

In FW. Murnau's classic satire *The Last Laugh* (1924), a doorman at a smart hotel is cast into despair when he's stripped of his resplendent uniform and demoted to lavatory attendant. Chadian writer/director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's film (his fourth feature) offers a more tragic variant on the story. Whereas Emil Jannings's doorman harms no one else in his misery, and Murnau and his screenwriter Carl Mayer even provide him with a heavily ironic happy ending, his Chadian counterpart Adam (addressed as 'Champ' in recognition of his erstwhile swimming prowess) regains his post as hotel pool attendant by means of an unforgivable betrayal, sacrificing his only child to retrieve his former status. It's not hard to foresee that there won't be any kind of happy ending.

Chad, one of Africa's unluckier states, has been racked by civil war and insurrection for much of the past three decades, and Haroun doesn't specify which of the various uprisings provides the backdrop to his film. It hardly matters; the warring sides are equally impersonal and remote, represented chiefly by TV footage of uniformed corpses, propagandist voices on the radio and the chunking rotor noises of the helicopters we repeatedly hear passing overhead. When Adam, heading home at night, encounters a small detachment of soldiers on the capital's otherwise deserted streets, their response is panicky and confused, some demanding he be shot and others wanting to let him go. They're presumably government forces but could equally be rebels; in this brute power struggle, ideology seems to be absent and there's little to choose between either side.

This scene, like a good many others in the film, is quietly observed in long-shot by an unmoving camera. Haroun

shuns excitable camerawork in action scenes, preferring to hold off at a distance, and at times there's an Ozu-like austerity about his technique: when Adam and his son Abdel sit silently at home after the younger man has displaced his father as pool attendant, while Adam's wife Mariam sits between them, serving them food and vainly trying to find out what's wrong, the camera watches from a few feet away in a long unbroken take. Close-ups are used sparingly and meaningfully. Demoted to gatekeeper, the previously dignified Adam is forced to scurry back and forth raising and lowering the barriers as cars hoot peremptorily at him. Sweating and humiliated, he slumps down on his chair and the camera tracks slowly into a close-up on his face; this, we can tell, is his moment of fateful decision.

Also reminiscent of Ozu is the underlying theme of generational clash. In the film's opening scene Adam and Abdel are horsing about in the hotel pool, competing to see who can stay under longest. When Abdel wins, Adam immediately laughs, "I let you win!" Playful though the scene is, it foreshadows what's to come; being supplanted by his son is more than Adam's pride can bear. Abdel too has his priorities, as we realise when, after he's been abducted into the army, his pregnant girlfriend shows up at Adam's house. His guilt exacerbated by her gentle presence, Adam sets out to put things right – but too late. The film ends as it began: Adam and Abdel are both in the water that they loved, but with one difference of awful irony. It's a final scene of utter desolation, the more powerful for its restraint.

♦♦ Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Produced by
Florence Stern
Written by
Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
Director of Photography
Laurent Brunet
Editor
Marie-Hélène Dozo
Art Director
Ledoux Madeona
Original Music
Wasis Diop
Original Songs
Djénéba Koné
Sound Recordist
Dana Farzanehpour
Costume Designer
Celine Delaire

CAST

Youssef Djaoro
Adam
Diouc Koma
Abdel
Emile Abossolo M'Bo
chief de quartier
Hadjé Fatimé N'Goua
Mariam
Mariam Yelolo
David
Djénéba Koné
Djénéba
Li Heling
Mme Wang
Rémadji Adèle
Ngaradoubaye
Souad



My son, my son, what have I done: Youssef Djaoro

SYNOPSIS US, the present. On her first day at the University of Los Angeles, fashion student Sara Matthews befriends hard-partying Tracy; at a fraternity party she flirts with Stephen, a cute drummer. Sara quickly bonds with her roommate Rebecca, an art major. Rebecca tells Tracy to stay away from Sara and rips out her belly-button ring, threatening to kill her if she tells anyone. Oblivious to Rebecca's possessive nature, Sara interprets her behaviour as over-protectiveness.

Sara and Stephen's relationship grows more serious. Sara contemplates moving into the apartment of her fashion designer friend Irene so that she can keep a kitten she's adopted. A furious Rebecca murders the kitten, then pretends she's lost it. When Sara's professor kisses her, Rebecca has him kicked out for sexual harassment. Sara goes home with Rebecca for Thanksgiving and learns that Rebecca should be taking anti-psychotic medication. After Rebecca gets a tattoo identical to Sara's, an unnerved Sara moves into the frat house with Stephen. When Sara's ex-boyfriend comes to town to see her, Rebecca disguises herself as Sara and murders him in his hotel room. Having seduced Irene at a club, Rebecca uses Irene's phone to text Sara, telling her to come over. Sara arrives to find Irene tied up. In the ensuing fight, Sara and Stephen kill Rebecca.

John Mbaiedoum
Etienne

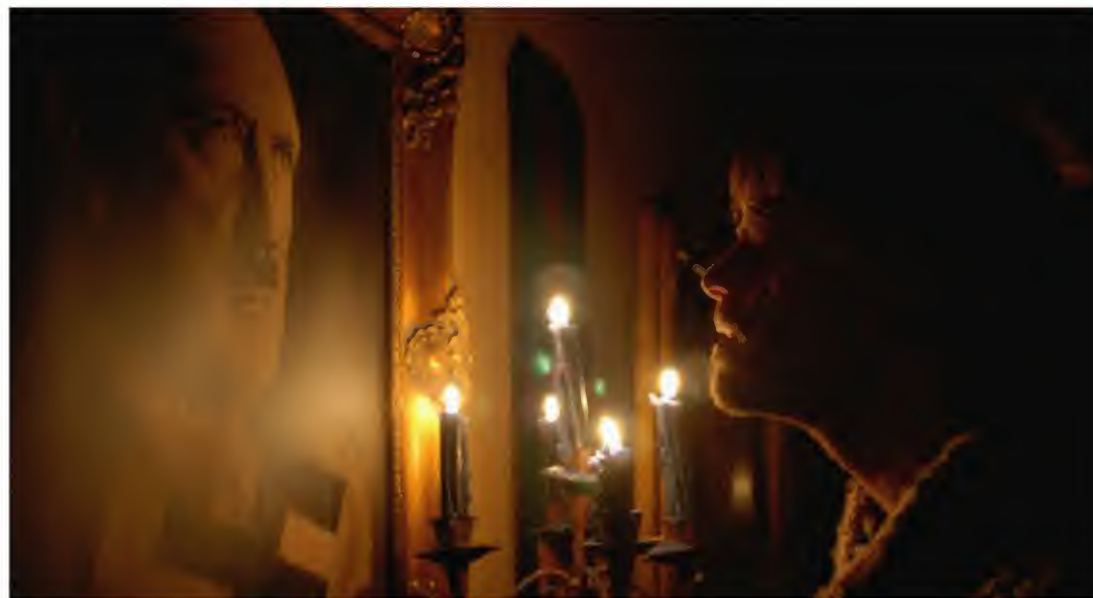
©Pili Films, Gai-Gai Productions, Entre Chien et Loup
Production Companies
Pili Films and Gai-Gai Productions present in co-production with Entre Chien et Loup with the participation of CNC – Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Canal + and CinéCinéma with financial support from the European Union (Fonds européen de Développement) and the help of Groupe des Etats ACP with the support of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique et des télédiffuseurs wallons with the participation de TV5Monde and the support of Fonds Francophone de Production Audiovisuelle du Sud a film produced by Florence Stern In partnership with Waza Images

(Cameroon), Films 21 (Burkina Faso), Cinemart With help from the tax shelters of Focozinc, Pranarom International, AR Media, Casa Kafka Pictures (Isabelle Molhant), Casa Kafka Pictures Movie Tax Shelter Empowered by Dexia Made with the support of the Tax Shelter of the Gouvernement Fédéral Belge

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

French theatrical title
Un homme qui crie



Mein kampf: Jake Muxworthy

Shadow

Italy 2009

Director: Federico Zampaglione

Certificate 18 77m 29s

"I came here to escape from this kind of bullshit!" exclaims Iraq War veteran David (Jake Muxworthy). 'Here' is an Alpine woodland known as 'the Shadow', where David is catching up with some mountain biking. "It's my life," he explains to fellow cyclist Angeline (Karina Testa); "it's the only time I truly feel at peace." And surely this veteran of the violence and aggression of Iraq deserves a little rest and recreation – yet there's trouble in this bikers' paradise, as the sylvan idyll is disrupted by the arrival of a pair of belligerent hunters (Chris Coppola, Ottaviano Blitch) intent on bagging themselves some human prey.

The second film (after 2007's *Nero bifamiliare*) directed by Italian electro-folk band Tiromancino's frontman Federico Zampaglione, *Shadow* begins by presenting itself as a *Deliverance*-style clash of civilisation and bestiality in the wilderness, before veering violently off track into torture-porn terrain when David wakes up to find himself and the hunters strapped to table-beds in an underground chamber of horrors, at the mercy of a silent, implacable tormentor. For all their conventionality in genre terms, Zampaglione handles both these scenarios convincingly enough to wrong-foot viewers, while further disorienting us with hints (via a local wartime ghost story told by Angeline) of a supernatural subtext.

All the different elements come together in the emaciated figure of the torturer. When he is not dressing up an anatomical mannequin or licking the back of a psychoactive toad, this ghoulish presence is himself something of an amateur filmmaker (in the genre of real horror), shooting his victims' sufferings on an ancient camera while also collecting reels of film documenting human atrocities (with

labels ranging from 'Hiroshima' to 'Abu Ghraib'). Zampaglione fully exploits the alarmingly cadaverous physique and sensual movements of Nuot Arquint, a dancer and actor previously seen in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *Il Divo* (2008), to create perhaps the most rivetingly creepy onscreen embodiment of death since Max Schreck's Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (1922).

Co-writing with his father Domenico, Zampaglione links backwoods slash-and-dash and scenes of shocking torture to broader geopolitical themes by way of a twist borrowed from *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), which he slyly acknowledges by lifting the narrative veil at precisely the moment that David is seen ascending the rungs of a ladder. The film's commentary on the horrors of fascism and war is at times lazy, too readily falling back on the imagery of Nazism (which admits no moral shading) and even at one point impishly juxtaposing images of Hitler, Stalin and a smirking George Bush Jr. But there's much to be admired here in the way that different genres are combined, and to a degree transcended, as cinema's vehicles of fantasy are brought face to face with the one reality from which respite can only be temporary and escape is ultimately impossible. **Anton Bitel**

CREDITS

Produced by
Massimo Ferrero
Producer
Vanessa Ferrero
Story/Screenplay
Federico Zampaglione
Domenico Zampaglione
Giacomo Gensini
Director of Photography
Marco Bassano
Editor
Eric Strand
Music
The Alvarius
Francesco Zampaglione
Production Sound Mixer
Gilberto Martinelli
Costume Designer
Raffaella Fantasia
Visual Effects Supervisor
for Canecane:
Giuseppe Squillacci

CAST

Jake Muxworthy
David
Karina Testa
Angeline
Chris Coppola
Buck
Ottaviano Blitch
Fred
Nuot Arquint
Morris
Emilio De Marchi
barman/doctor

©Blu Cinematografica
G.F. Srl
Production Companies
Ellemme Group S.p.A
Massimo Ferrero and
Federico Zampaglione
present an Ellemme
Group S.p.A production
A film by Federico
Zampaglione
Executive Producer: Blu
Cinematografica G.F. Srl
With the collaboration of
Comune di Tarvisio

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
BlueLight

6,973 ft +15 frames

Italian theatrical title
Shadow L'ombra

SYNOPSIS Iraq War veteran David is cycling in an Alpine hinterland known as 'the Shadow'. Stopping at a mountain chalet with a friendly bartender, he intervenes when two aggressive hunters, Fred and Buck, harass a young woman. Later, when David loses his tent in a high wind, the woman, Angeline, helps him out. She tells him a local legend about part of the forest being haunted ever since the wartime massacre of a village's entire population.

After another violent run-in with Fred and Buck, Angeline and David become separated as they flee into the woods. Meanwhile the hunters are themselves attacked by an unseen figure. In the night, David reaches an isolated homestead where he is chased and knocked out. He awakes strapped to a table, with Fred and Buck similarly restrained. A half-naked, emaciated figure films himself first cooking Fred alive on the table, and later cutting out David's eyelid. David manages to free himself, releasing Buck and the hideously burnt Fred as well. As they flee the building, David hears Angeline calling his name, and heads back. Fred and Buck are killed in the woods.

Searching for Angeline among war memorabilia, atrocity film reels, and burnt corpses, David bayonets his tormentor and ascends a ladder towards Angeline's voice. He wakes in a field hospital in Iraq, beside his now dead fellow soldiers Fred and Buck. The bartender and Angeline are in fact the doctor and nurse who have snatched David from death – though he has lost both legs.

Source Code

USA/France 2011

Director: Duncan Jones

Certificate 12A 93m 13s

Duncan Jones's follow-up to *Moon* (2009) begins with vertiginous aerial shots of Chicago over a pastiche Bernard Herrmann score, eventually fixing on train passengers Christina and Sean, the latter a stranger to himself if not to her. Though *Source Code* never quite elicits a Hitchcockian shudder, finally opting for sentiment over metaphysical speculation, along the way its ingeniously wrought and skilfully realised suspense plot has subtext to burn. In eight minutes' time the train will blow up, killing everyone on board: Sean is no longer Sean but Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal), a US army helicopter pilot, mightily confused but, we and he learn, sent from a few hours in the future to identify the bomber before he can strike again. It doesn't take long for Stevens-as-Sean to fall for Christina (Michelle Monaghan) and to act - as Sean, a schoolteacher, wouldn't - on the feeling; but nothing can keep the eight minutes from ending, and what Stevens does as Sean belongs to a parallel dimension.

Or something along those lines. Stevens, say his military handlers Goodwin (Vera Farmiga) and Rutledge (Jeffrey Wright) in between trips, hasn't really been sent back in time; it's just that their technology enables his mind repeatedly to access Sean's posthumous residual memory of his last 480 seconds; and Stevens, they say more reluctantly, is himself at death's door, his own body all but destroyed in battle. In eight-minute chunks, Stevens-as-Sean juggles the assignment with his quest to find out the truth about his predicament, among other tasks romantic and familial; but even with the mysteries solved, Sean is fated to die and Stevens is threatened with a permanent state of mental torture, as Rutledge's instrument in the war on terror. The Gordian Knot is finally cut when Stevens persuades Goodwin to let his body die so that he

SYNOPSIS When a Chicago-bound commuter train is destroyed by terrorists, the mind of Colter Stevens, a soldier on life support, is given access to the memory of Sean, one of the victims. Stevens, instructed by military personnel via videolink, is made to live the train's final eight minutes over and over again, not to prevent the explosion, which is impossible, since the eight minutes are experienced in a parallel dimension, but to gather intelligence on the bomber, who plans to strike again.

Severely disoriented, Stevens, while carrying out his mission, also attempts to uncover the truth about his predicament and refuses to accept that the bomb can't be stopped, partly because of his growing attraction to Christina, Sean's friend and fellow passenger, whom he wants to save. With Christina's help Stevens finds out that he has been reported dead in Afghanistan, and concludes that he is being exploited.

After he has identified the bomber, Stevens persuades his controller Goodwin to give him a final eight minutes to prevent the explosion and to let his body die in the present, against the wishes of Goodwin's CO Rutledge. On this last trip Stevens-as-Sean disarms the bomb and apprehends the bomber. He kisses Christina just as his time runs out.

Within the parallel dimension thereby created, Stevens and Christina continue to live happily together. Stevens sends an email to Goodwin, also in this parallel dimension, to alert her to the ethical questions raised by the 'source code' programme.

can live on as Sean, with Christina, in the parallel dimension he has created by foiling the terrorists.

All this is accomplished with verve and some wit, albeit reminiscent of *Groundhog Day* (1993) - each go-round has a comic variation on the last - and the perennial logical problems of time-travel and parallel-dimension stories are handled in such a way that they don't impede the film's emotional flow (later, for example, one might ask how Stevens could see anything that Sean hadn't). Moreover, *Source Code* sustains an intriguing discourse on beginnings and endings. The terrorist, a Timothy McVeigh type, wants his bomb to return everything back to zero; on the surface, Christina seems to want to do the same, telling Sean she has taken his advice and quit her job to go overseas. Stevens, meanwhile, who is condemned to reset every eight minutes and is destined to have his memory wiped after the mission, wants the opposite - to live with past mistakes, not to run from them, and in particular to mend fences with his estranged father.

He spends another part of his final trip imploring his fellow passengers to seize the day, not live in dreams, and does likewise by responding to

Christina's high-stakes prompt and asking her out. She says yes, and that she's been waiting for him to ask - but hang on. Stevens's attraction to Christina is taken for granted - she's beautiful and, he discovers, forthright and witty. But so far as Christina is concerned, Stevens is Sean, only twitchier and more confident than usual, and her attraction is, we infer, based on their prior friendship. The film ends with a slightly silly warning about the ethics of using 'time reassignment' to prevent bomb attacks, and the sinister and suggestive implications of the main story's resolution - Sean's replacement by Stevens, undetected by Christina - are passed over. But another way of seeing *Source Code* is as Sean's recurring train-ride daydream, finally lived out. **Henry K. Miller**

CREDITS

Produced by
Philippe Rousselet
Mark Gordon
Jordan Wynn

Written by
Ben Ripley

Director of Photography
Don Burgess

Editor
Paul Hirsch

Production Designer
Barry Chusid

Music
Chris Bacon

Sound Designer
Tom Bellfort

Costume Designer
Renée April

Visual Effects
Modus FX
Rodeo FX
MPC

Stunt Co-ordinators
Stéphane Lefebvre
Patrick Kerton
Michael Scherer

Executive Producers
Hawk Koch
Jeb Brody
Fabrice Gianfermi

Dolby Digital Colour by
Technicolor

Prints by
DeLuxe
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

8,389 ft +8 frames

CAST
Jake Gyllenhaal
Colter Stevens
Michelle Monaghan
Christina Warren
Vera Farmiga
Colleen Goodwin
Jeffrey Wright
Dr Rutledge
Michael Arden
Derek Frost
Cas Anvar
Hazmi

Sucker Punch

USA 2011

Director: Zack Snyder

Certificate 12A 109m 36s

The elephants' graveyard is full of expensive yet personal fantasies which have been given the greenlight on the back of a successful track record (Barry Levinson's *Toys*, Rob Reiner's *North*) and demonstrate that what goes on inside the minds of successful movie directors is seldom as interesting as they think it is.

Zack Snyder has a track record in tackling 'cool' projects - though he often seems to miss their point - and a strange ability to embrace the comic-book fascism of *300* (2006) and the comic-book wet liberalism of *Watchmen* (2009) with equal flash and sincerity. This is the first Snyder project to be based on his own idea rather than a pre-existing film, comic book or novel. It's at once hideously derivative - setting a film in the subjective reality of an asylum inmate goes all the way back to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) - and painfully earnest as it struggles to say something about the objectification and oppression of women while getting hot actresses into fetish outfits for the third-layer-of-unreality action sequences that are the film's obvious draw. Like *Inception*, it's a dream-within-a-dream story. The contrast shows how canny Christopher Nolan was in establishing the differing layers of unreality in order to question the one we instinctively take as real.

Sucker Punch begins with a wordless montage scored like a trailer (a favourite Snyder technique, deployed much better in the opening of *Watchmen*) in which 20-year-old Babydoll's dire peril is demonstrated and she is committed to an asylum where she will be lobotomised to order. This isn't that different from the set-up of John Carpenter's *The Ward* (2010), a more lucid account of a traumatised girl's internal struggles being played out as a horror movie. Then the film flips from the asylum reality to the heroine's imagined version, a burlesque musical melodrama in which the songs are replaced by remix-scored battle scenes - and Snyder lets fly with pin-up chicks taking on giant samurai demons (evoking Toho's Majin films), zeppelins and steampunk German zombie soldiers (this even mashes up two world wars), kung-fu platitudes from Scott Glenn (an acceptable David Carradine substitute) and futuristic trains swarming with robots. It's a problem that the frame story is as subjective and stylised as the fantasies (it seems to be the 1950s but with a Eurhythmics remix on the soundtrack), a choice that makes it impossible to care about the heroine (Emily Browning looks like Lady Penelope done up for a porn shoot).

Since Babydoll is unjustly condemned to an asylum, why does she even have mad fantasies - or are we to conclude that she really is cracked and imagines the busy melodrama with the wicked stepfather and the martyred sister? The thread that gets the most



Missing believed wiped: Jake Gyllenhaal



Teenage lobotomy: Emily Browning

dramatic weight is the interim 12A brothel fantasy, in which (dubiously) an abused girl sees herself as an even more abused girl. Later we're told (but not shown) that things that happen in this level play out in reality – Babydoll has stabbed an orderly and helped another patient to escape. Then a voiceover explains that the real protagonist of the story wasn't Babydoll, lobotomised into the kind of escape that featured at the end of *Brazil* (and last borrowed by *Repo Men*), but another character, Sweet Pea, about whom we've learned even less. The question of who got punched and who's the sucker remains open.

♦♦ Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Deborah Snyder
Zack Snyder
Screenplay
Zack Snyder
Steve Shibuya
Story
Zack Snyder
Director of Photography
Larry Fong
Edited by
William Hoy
Production Designer
Rick Carter
Music by/Songs

Arranged and Produced by
Tyler Bates
Marius De Vries
Sound Mixer
Michael McGee
Costumes Designed by
Michael Wilkinson
Fantasy Sequence Concept Designs
The Aaron Sims Company
Visual Effects
MPC
Pixomondo Visual Effects

Animal Logic
Prime Focus
DigiScope
Stunt Co-ordinator/ Fight Co-ordinator
Damon Caro
Stunt Co-ordinators
Tim Rigby
James M. Churchman
Paul Leonard
Nick Brandon

CAST

Emily Browning
Babydoll
Abbie Cornish
Sweet Pea
Jena Malone
Rocket
Vanessa Hudgens
Blondie
Jamie Chung
Amber
Carla Gugino
Dr Vera Gorski/Madam Gorski
Oscar Isaac
Blue Jones
Jon Hamm
High Roller/doctor
Scott Glenn
wise man
Richard Cetrone
CJ
Gerard Plunkett
stepfather

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Entertainment Inc. and

Legendary Pictures
Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation in association with
Legendary Pictures
A Cruel and Unusual production
A Zack Snyder film
Executive Producers
Thomas Tull
Wesley Coller
Jon Jashni
Chris deFaria
Jim Rowe
William Fay

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

9,864 ft +7 frames

IMAX prints
110m 40s
159,352 ft

Third Star

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Hattie Dalton

A cross-breed of that species of cancer movie in which terminal patients take one last journey (of *The Bucket List* or *Hawks* variety) and the in-memoriam road-trip of *Last Orders* or Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, this bantering and mildly mawkish Welsh buddy movie delivers a double dose of manly sentimentality. Its unique selling point is that terminally ill 29-year-old James (Benedict Cumberbatch) is alive and acutely opinionated about the inevitable insights into male relationships and the fragility of life, which emerge as his three best friends take one last hike to Barafundle Bay, pushing him in a customised wheelchair-cum-wagon. But it inexplicably fails to make much of this dramatically until the last few scenes, when James presents the trio with the kind of meaty moral and emotional challenge the film could have used an hour earlier.

Determinedly upbeat and cheerfully laddish in tone, as if resolved not to be a disease-drama, debut screenwriter Vaughan Sivell's script uses up its first third on joshing exchanges intended to establish the men's bond. Where a more adventurous film might have worked in a welter of shifting alliances, surprises and reversals early on (think of what *The Big Chill* crammed into one funeral weekend), *Third Star* takes its time. Eccentrically picturesque encounters (a brawl in a pub garden with locals mysteriously clad in fancy-dress, an obstructive ferryman whose trips are "£3 single, £6.50 return") are carefully inserted to vary the cycle of happy teasing and veiled tension.

Director Hattie Dalton, shooting her first feature, varies the handsome outdoor visuals by dropping into high-class home-video footage for some of

the gambolling, which gives these scenes the air of a mid-priced mobile-phone commercial. The striking quirkiness of her Bafta-winning short *The Banker* (2004) is disappointingly absent, apart from Hugh Bonneville's passing beachcomber, caught hunting a long-lost cargo of Star Wars figurines. It's all pleasantly handled, thoroughly good-looking and far from clumsy, but the neatly demarcated characters and issues (competent Bill, caring Davy and arrogant Miles, reproached in turn by James for making the thirtysomething compromises about love and work that he will never face himself) feel slickly schematic. Even the comic business of a tent accidentally torched by fireworks seems deliberately placed, a gesture to lighten the increasingly quarrelsome tone.

Cumberbatch, thankfully, finds a welcome poignancy, not within James's morphine-muffled illness but in his insatiable urge to scratch his friends' failings till they bleed. An actor of great subtlety, he infuses his jokey, prickly exchanges with a melancholy that makes James's righteous truth-telling an act born of unbearable frustration. He sets the bar high, however, and only JJ Feild's bluff, straight-talking Miles, whose high-achieving reputation is dismantled in a series of revelations you can see coming from the other side of Barafundle Bay, can match him in the film's increasingly fraught later scenes.

Once these two take over the emotional heavy lifting, one realises that Dalton's sensitive direction and cinematographer Carlos Catalan's gorgeous, mutable Pembrokeshire landscapes have been responsible for giving a burnished, wistful veneer to the pretty but predictable scenes that built up to the film's climax. Underneath *Third Star*'s classy cladding, which camouflages its maudlin streak and conventional melodramatic underpinnings, there lies a TV movie first and last.

♦♦ Kate Stables



Four go mad in Wales: 'Third Star'

SYNOPSIS Brattleboro, Vermont, mid-20th century. Twenty-year-old Babydoll is committed to an asylum run by Dr Vera Gorski, who believes in letting patients act out their fantasies. Babydoll's stepfather bribes Blue, an orderly, to ensure that she is lobotomised within a week.

Babydoll sees her new surroundings as a nightclub-cum-brothel in which Blue is the gangster proprietor, Gorski the choreographer-madam and the other patients – sisters Sweet Pea and Rocket, Blondie and Amber – are dancer-prostitutes. In this fantasy, Babydoll discovers she has the power to spellbind audiences with her dancing, and can project herself into another layer of fantasy where the girls are warriors fighting giant samurai, German zombie soldiers, dragons and other foes.

Though Sweet Pea is reluctant, Babydoll persuades the girls to work on an escape plan so that she can get out of the club before the end of the week, when she is to be given to a patron known as the High Roller. The girls collect ordinary objects – a map, a cigarette lighter, a knife and a key – for the plan, pulling off these heists while Babydoll is dancing. In the course of the thefts, Rocket is killed and Amber persuaded to inform. Blue kills Amber and Blondie; Babydoll stabs Blue, only to encounter the High Roller – who, in the asylum, is the visiting doctor persuaded to perform the lobotomy.

As Babydoll retreats into a catatonic fantasy, she believes her mission was to ensure the escape of the real-world analogue of Sweet Pea.

SYNOPSIS Pembrokeshire, present day. Terminal cancer sufferer James sets off on a trip to Barafundle Bay with best friends Bill, Davy and Miles. After getting involved in a brawl in a pub garden, they hike towards their destination, James riding in an improvised cart. Reckless with morphine and dope, James reproaches Bill for accepting a life of second-bests. An impromptu firework display burns one of their tents. James taunts Davy, who acts as his carer, and is told off by the others. James's wheelchair-wagon is lost over a cliff during an argument with the arrogant Miles, but he wants to continue nevertheless. As the friends piggyback James across the uneven terrain, tensions flare up: Bill admits that his girlfriend is pregnant; Miles and Davy fight; Miles admits that James's illness disgusted him, and that his business is collapsing. Arriving at Barafundle Bay, Miles confesses that he is sleeping with James's sister.

James tells his friends that he intends to drown himself, and the three try to talk him out of it. At dawn, they let him swim out but go after him. Davy gets cramp and Bill takes him back. James asks Miles to help him end his life. Miles holds him while he drowns, and brings his body back to the beach.

CREDITS

Producers
Vaughan Sivell
Kelly Broad
Writer
Vaughan Sivell
Director of Photography
Carlos Catalán
Editor
Peter Christelis
Production Designer
Richard Campling
Composer
Stephen Hillon
Production Sound Mixer
Tim White
Costume Designer
Marianne Agertoft

CAST

Tom Burke
Davy
Benedict Cumberbatch
James
JJ Feild
Miles
Adam Robertson
Bill
Hugh Bonneville
beachcomber
Rupert Frazer
Mr Griffith
Helen Griffin
Mrs Griffith
Karl Johnson
ticket seller
Nia Roberts
Chloe
Eros Vlahos
angel boy
Brian Hilling
angry man at pagan festival

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Independent
Production Companies
Distribution presents a Western Edge Pictures production in

association with Memory Box Films with the Film Agency for Wales and Matador Pictures in association with Cinema One. Regent Capital and BBC Cymru Wales Developed and supported by Film Agency for Wales through the proceeds of the National Lottery through The Arts Council of Wales
Executive Producers
Margaret Matheson
Nigel Thomas
Pauline Burt
Kate Crowther
Charlotte Wells
Paul Higgins

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Independent Distribution



Several samurai: Ihara Tsuyoshi, Kubota Masataka

13 Assassins

Japan/United Kingdom 2010

Director: Miike Takashi

Certificate 15 124m 54s

13 Assassins is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 52.

CREDITS

Producers
Umezawa Michihiko
Ichikawa Minami
Shiraishi Toichiro
Ohno Takahiro
Yoshida Hirotsugu
Maeda Shigeji
Screenplay
Tengan Daisuke
Original Story
Kemiya Shoichiro I
Director of Photography
Kita Nobuyasu
Editor
Yamashita Kenji
Music
Endô Kôji
Sound Recordist
Nakamura Jun
Costume Designer
Sawataishi Kazuhiro

CAST

Yakusho Kôji
Shinzaemon Shimada
Yamada Takayuki
Shinrokuro
Iseya Yusuke
Koyata
Inagaki Goro
Lord Naritsugu
Matsudaira
Ichimura Masachika
Hanbei Kitou
Hira Mikijiro
Sir Doi
Matsukata Hiroki
Kuranaga
Sawamura Ikki
Mitsuhashi
Furuta Arata
Sahara
Ihara Tsuyoshi
Hirayama
Kubota Masataka
Ogura

©[Thirteen Assassins]
Film Partners (TV
Asahi/Toho/Sedic
International/Dentsu/
Shogakukan/Recorded
Picture Company/The
Asahi Shimbun/ABC/
NBN/KBC/HTB/
Yahoo! Japan/Tsutaya
Group/KHB/SATV/
Hiroshima Home
Television)
Production Companies
A film by Miike Takashi
A production of Sedic
International (Japan)
In association with Sedic
Deux (Japan),
Rakussha (Japan)
Chief Executive Producers
Uematsu Michio
Shimatani Yoshinari
Shimamoto Yuji
Ohnishi Yutaka
Machida Tomoko
Wakusaka Satoshi
Yoshida Kagami
Takeuchi Kenji
Ogitali Tadao
Kitano Hiroaki
Ohmura Toshiharu
Ito Yuzo
Tsuge Ichiro
Hama Kitaro
Executive Producers
Sedic International Inc.

— Japan:
Toshiaki Nakazawa
Recorded Picture
Company — UK:
Jeremy Thomas
TV Asahi Corporation —
Japan:
Takashi Hirao

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

11.241 ft +0 frames

Japanese theatrical title
Jûsan-nin no shikaku

SYNOPSIS Japan, the 1840s. The suicide of a wronged nobleman prompts an investigation into the habits of sadistic young Lord Naritsugu, who exploits his power to kill and rape at whim. As the younger brother of the Shogun, Naritsugu is untouchable — and he's scheduled to be promoted to a higher political position, where his lust for violence and cruelty will cause irreparable damage to the nation. Faced with this dilemma, high-ranking official Doi secretly hires renowned samurai Shinzaemon Shimada to assassinate Naritsugu.

Presented with one of Naritsugu's victims — a woman whose arms, legs and tongue have been cut off — Shinzaemon agrees to take the assignment. He proceeds to gather 13 skilled swordsmen (including his nephew) willing to follow him on what is likely to be a suicide mission: to attack Naritsugu, guarded by his troops, on his journey home from Edo. The swordsmen choose a town on the route that is well suited for an ambush, and buy the help of the locals, while a mountain man joins them to bring the team's number up to 13.

When Naritsugu arrives, his forces are even bigger than expected. But this does not deter the 13, who face off against 200 enemies in an extended battle, during which Shinzaemon climactically confronts his old sparring partner Hanbei. Naritsugu's lieutenant, Hanbei rejects his master's behaviour, but remains unquestioningly loyal to him because of his samurai code of honour. After Hanbei's defeat, a visibly excited Naritsugu is challenged and finally dies in agony in front of the mortally wounded Shinzaemon. Only Shinzaemon's nephew and the mountain man are left standing.

The Veteran

United Kingdom 2010

Director: Matthew Hope

Arguably, every cycle of domestically set, post-WWII post-traumatic-stress thrillers describes an arc descending from the serious and psychologically aware to the trite and merely exploitative. This British example of the genre — opening within weeks of Ken Loach's more high-minded but similarly themed *Route Irish* — suggests not just a decline but a precipitous plummet.

Not that the cinematic skills of cast and crew aren't apparent. Judged purely as an exploitative urban thriller, *The Veteran* has much to recommend it: the promise shown by cinematographer Philipp Blaubach in such recent films as *Hush* and *The Disappearance of Alice Creed* is confirmed by his fine London location work here; Emma Gaffney's excellent editing contributes to the film's dramatic energy and cumulative sense of tension; and director Matthew Hope, in his second feature, matches his confidence in camera placing with his sensitivity with his key actors, notably the underused and underrated Toby Kebbell. As gone-rogue ex-paratrooper Miller, who returns from Afghanistan to find that his London council estate has turned into a war zone of its own, Kebbell provides a credibility, watchability and sympathy unwarranted either by the part (as scripted by Hope from Afghan vet Robert Henry Craft's screenplay) or by any normative ethical standards.

Where the film falls down — disastrously — is in its transparently preposterous claims to psychological realism, social comment and (albeit unorthodox) moral rectitude. Its initially casuistic reasoning (Miller's justification for taking on a legally questionable security job is provided by former colleague Danny's argument that "we're totally fucking redundant") rapidly degenerates into pure vigilantism in quickstep with its progressively ludicrous and labyrinthine conspiracy-theorising, culminating in a laughable self-justifying oration by Brian Cox's shady security boss Langdon, standing in the iconic debris of a docklands demolition site, which contrives to outdo Cliff Robertson's 'oil and water' speech at the climax of 1975's *Three Days of the Condor*. (Such perverted moralising seems, however, to have escaped the notice of UK veterans' mental-health charity Combat Stress, which has kindly given the film its backing.)

More generally, *The Veteran* epitomises the problem with making movies about stress-suffering ex-combatants — in stress-suffering countries that instigate the wars in the first place — aimed at audiences not exclusively composed of moral philosophers. Themes of unemployment, alienation, psychological breakdown and impotency — not to mention inappropriate martial competency



Killing machine: Toby Kebbell

— are hard to make thrilling or sexy. What's left is inchoate rage, the assimilation and sublimation of which informs the heart of Matthew Hope's flawed movie. ➡ **Wally Hammond**

CREDITS

Produced by
Debbie Shuter
Kim Leggatt
Written by
Matthew Hope
Robert Henry Craft
Director of Photography
Philipp Blaubach
Film Editor
Emma Gaffney
Production Designer
Chris Richmond
Music
Mark Delany
Sound Designer
Steve Browell

Costume Designer
Emma Fryer
Stunt Co-ordinator
Julian Spencer

CAST

Toby Kebbell
Robert Miller
Adi Bielski
Alayna Wallace
Tony Curran
Chris Turner
Ashley Thomas
Tyrone Jones
Torn Brooke
Danny Turner
Ivanno Jeremiah
Fahad Sahal

Eboeta Ayemer
Ryan Sahal
Brian Cox
Gerry Langdon
Selva Rasalingam
Fawwaz Abdullah
Christopher Peter Smith
Omar
Conrad Peters
Khaled
Mem Ferda
Hakeem
Steve Weston
Rarnush Jashari

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Production Companies
DMK Productions
presents in association
with Iconiq Drinks,
Premiere Picture &
Media Pro One Ltd
Executive Producers
Dawn Pritchard

Sheila Pritchard
Jason Garrett
David Rogers
Gary Barnshaw

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

Vidal Sassoon How One Man Changed the World with a Pair of Scissors

USA 2010

Director: Craig Teper

Certificate PG 93m 27s

Vidal Sassoon charts the life and work of the hair stylist who became an embodiment of the brand he created, his name as synonymous with sexual liberation in the 1960s as it is with shampoo now. Framed by footage of the 82-year-old reflecting temperately on his life, the film takes in his humble origins in an East London orphanage before going on to consider his global success as a hair stylist, celebrity and lothario.

Concerned mostly with Sassoon's significance as a 1960s icon, the film is saturated with instantly recognisable black-and-white images of models and celebrities sporting his era-defining geometric haircuts, and focuses on collaborations with scenesters like Mary Quant, for whom the invention of the miniskirt and Sassoon's work were interrelated.

Choosing to shoot much of the present-day footage — interviews with contemporaries, or shots of the man himself walking through London — in black and white, the filmmakers construct a strong visual style, one clearly designed to match the aesthetic they're channelling. But although this imbues the whole with a seductive slickness, it also, crucially, undermines the film's seriousness (bear in mind that the full title is *How One Man Changed the World with a Pair of Scissors*). Of Sassoon's involvement in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for instance, we see just a few seconds of footage from New Orleans, with his words "...so I thought, how can we get hairdressing involved in this?" ringing glibly in our ears. So too we cut quickly away from a scene in which he talks frankly about the death of his daughter from an overdose, back to yet more

monochrome stills of girls with asymmetric haircuts. A penchant for gloss, coupled with a tendency to overstate his importance (the opening sets the tone, overlaying footage of Sassoon the elderly with a voiceover branding him a "myth" and a "messiah", before likening him to Einstein), undercuts our engagement with him and, more unfortunately, leads him to appear occasionally ridiculous.

Sassoon is a natural in front of the camera, apparently entirely comfortable eulogising his own life with little prompting from the filmmakers. While it's certainly a plus point, providing a necessary energy and focus, when combined with the film's sexed-up style and often hyperbolic tone this showmanship only heightens a creeping sense of manipulation. A one-sided homage to an admittedly worthy subject, the documentary ends up playing out like a 90-minute advertisement.

➡ **Chloe Roddick**

SYNOPSIS A documentary about Vidal Sassoon, whose iconic short haircuts pioneered a new geometric style and symbolised the modernity and liberation of the 1960s. Framed by interviews with Sassoon (now in his eighties) and footage of magazine staff mocking up a biography of his life, the film includes comment and recollections from many of Sassoon's contemporaries. It also considers his success in the US, where he starred in commercials and hosted a weekly chat show, and his ongoing work as a political and social activist.

CREDITS

Producers
Michael Gordon
Jackie Gilbert Bauer
Written by
Heather Campbell
Gordon
Craig Teper
Directors of Photography
Saul Gittens
Craig Teper
Edited by
Craig Teper
Original Music
Steven Gnesgraber
Re-recording Mixer
Kevin Wilson

A Michael Gordon
production
Executive Producer
Jim Czarniecki

In Colour/Black and White
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

8,410 ft +8 frames

Publicity title
Vidal Sassoon The Movie *How One Man Changed the World with a Pair of Scissors*

©Vidal Sassoon The Movie, LLC
Production Company



From hair to eternity: Vidal Sassoon, Mary Quant

Water for Elephants

USA/United Kingdom/
Australia 2011
Director: Francis Lawrence
Certificate 12A 120m 22s

Take a Sara Gruen novel, hire screenwriter Richard LaGravenese (*The Horse Whisperer*, *P.S. I Love You*), cast Robert Pattinson and you have a sentimental, female-friendly hit on your hands. Pattinson is typically chiselled and distant as Jacob Jankowski, the principled vet who joins a travelling circus and falls for the boss's wife, performer Marlena (an elegant Reese Witherspoon). But it's Christoph Waltz who elevates this above standard chick-flick territory. Riffing on his sinister, mock-friendly turn in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), he brings ringmaster August to life with a finely nuanced performance: this is a man who will pour you a glass of champagne with one hand and beat you with the other. Marlena and Jacob both feel the force of his affection and his wrath, as does Rosie, the elephant they adore. An impressive onscreen presence, Rosie is integral to the plot, bringing the central pair together. As Marlena graduates from riding delicate horses to a hulking great elephant, she prepares for changes and greater risks in both life and love.

LaGravenese's script is economical with dialogue to a fault: many exchanges feel simplistic and clichéd, a cynical lurch for romantic buttons. And while there are scenes of hardship, this travelling circus is idealised to an unintentionally comical degree: a scene in which a horse is shot is turned into a misty-eyed, blood-free moment of

SYNOPSIS Present-day US. Elderly Jacob Jankowski misses a circus performance and sits down with an employee to tell him the story of his time with the Benzini Bros Circus.

Cornell University, the 1930s. Veterinary student Jacob loses his parents, Polish immigrants, in an accident. He stows away on a train that turns out to be carrying the Benzini Bros Circus. He soon becomes the circus vet and challenges the authority of owner and ringmaster August Rosenbluth, who is married to star horse-rider Marlena.

August buys an elephant, Rosie, and assigns Marlena to ride her, and Jacob to look after her. After August treats her harshly, Rosie runs out of a performance; August beats her badly, and Jacob has to be restrained from retaliating. While caring for Rosie with a Polish employee, Jacob discovers that she takes orders in that language and August is delighted. Jacob, August and Marlena go out to a restaurant that's raided by police; Jacob and Marlena flee and, in the mêlée, kiss.

August later confronts them and fights with Jacob, who flees with Marlena to a hotel. They sleep together. August's men arrive and beat up Jacob and take Marlena. When Jacob arrives at the circus, Marlena tells him of a plan to overthrow August. During the performance, the animals are let loose and customers flee. August tries to strangle Marlena but Rosie stops him, hitting him with his stick and killing him.

Back in the present, Jacob explains that he and Marlena had five children and lived happily until she passed away in her sleep, some time after Rosie died. He is given a job selling tickets at the circus.

romance. One also wonders where Marlena's team of stylists is hiding.

The costumes are admittedly sumptuous and cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto brings much of the elegance he displayed in *Beautiful and Babel* to this film, building on the colourful, carnivalesque look of his earlier *Frida*. Director Francis Lawrence (*I Am Legend*) creates a strong sense of time and place, most notably in a scene in which Jacob is led through the circus train to meet the various classes of performers and workers. The camera follows him through the entire length of the bustling train as he is caressed by strippers, dismissed by poker-playing suits and slung into dusty quarters with a disgruntled midget and his dog. It's an engaging, entertaining introduction to a world you're willing to be immersed in. The romance almost gets in the way of this fascinating portrait, but both are

slimmed down versions of those in the book: LaGravenese dispenses with dramatic developments such as an illicit pregnancy and explicit schizophrenia.

Rather than submitting to its darker potential, the film settles for formulaic romance within a fascinating world. Nonetheless, it offers plenty for those susceptible to sentiment, not to mention beautiful actors and animals. It's not hard to see why Pattinson - star of the similarly-themed *Twilight* - would be considered this film's golden ticket.

► Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by
Gil Netter
Erwin Stoff
Andrew R. Tannenbaum
Screenplay
Richard LaGravenese
Based upon the novel by
Sara Gruen
Director of Photography
Rodrigo Prieto
Film Editor
Alan Edward Bell
Production Designer
Jack Fisk
Music
James Newton Howard
Sound Designer
Jeremy Pearson
Costume Designer
Jacqueline West
Stunt Co-ordinator
Chns O'Hara

CAST

Reese Witherspoon
Marlena Rosenbluth
Robert Pattinson
Jacob Jankowski
Christoph Waltz
August Rosenbluth
Paul Schneider
Charlie O'Brien III
Jim Norton
Camel
Hal Holbrook
old Jacob
Mark Povinelli
'Kinko', Walter
Richard Brake
Grady
Stephen Monroe
Taylor
Wade
Ken Foree
Earl
Scott MacDonald
Blackie
James Frain
Rosie's caretaker

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Production Companies
A Fox 2000 Pictures presentation
A 3 Arts Entertainment/Gil Netter/Flashpoint Entertainment production
Made in association with Dune Entertainment and Ingenious Media
Produced in association with Big Screen Productions
Executive Producer
Kevin Halloran

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]
Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)
10.833 ft +0 frames

Winnie the Pooh

USA 2011
Directors: Stephen Anderson, Don Hall
Certificate U 73m 14s

Disney's original Winnie the Pooh 1960s shorts and portmanteau feature *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* (1977) have traditionally been looked down on. Children's literature guardians regard them as a monstrous merchandising mill traducing A.A. Milne's nursery perennial, and animation enthusiasts as products of a sustained creative low point at the House of Mouse. But suddenly they're a beloved institution, with the theatrical franchise and their nostalgic charms resuscitated by executive producer John Lasseter, as part of Disney's drive to revive hand-drawn animation.

This endearing new version, skillfully eliding several newly chosen episodes from Milne's book, turns out to be a masterly reboot, even (whisper it) a pacey improvement on the dawdling original feature. Unlike the jarring TV update *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* (2007-10), it's set in the innocent era of its predecessor and retains its equally uncorrupted spirit, directors Stephen Anderson and Don Hall firmly rejecting the knowing tone of most children's cinema, any trace of pop culture or eye-aching 3D antics in the Hundred Acre Wood.

The warm (no chilly CGI here) and whimsical animation is key in this, with fluidly expressive lead characters honed by veterans of the Disney animated feature resurgence of the 1990s, including Mark Henn, Eric Goldberg and Andreas Deja (who puts characteristic visual wit into the traditionally tedious Tigger). Respectful of the iconic original 'look' to the point of fetishism, right down to the E.H. Shepherd-style watercolour backgrounds (animator Burny Mattinson, who worked on the original shorts, was drafted in to ensure continuity), the filmmakers expand on its visual conceits with great inventiveness. The animated book illustrations first seen in *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* (1966) have been extended to allow the characters to scramble, tangle and knock down the book's sentences as Piglet does when hoisted into a paragraph by a wandering balloon. But the film really comes into its own with a rollicking blackboard-chalked sequence in which the mythical 'Baksun' monster grows like Topsy from the animal friends' confusion over Christopher Robin's note saying he'll be "back soon".

Despite the fact that Uncle Walt only produced Winnie the Pooh shorts, the film's use of interwoven rather than episodic story lets it stand up perfectly well at 70 minutes. Simple comedy predicaments are neatly embellished with wry comic exchanges, such as Piglet's bemusement over 'knot' and 'not', or imaginative excursions like the trippy, honey-dripping hallucinations that ambush the hungry Pooh. Bouncy,



Elephant clan: Christoph Waltz, Robert Pattinson, Reese Witherspoon

appropriate and so Sherman Bros-lite as to be unmemorable, the new songs are, however, a disappointment, particularly since the character voice work is first rate, notably Craig Ferguson's logorrheic Owl. The film will doubtless launch what Disney-denouncer Henry Giroux has described as a "commercial blitzkrieg" aimed at creating child consumers – *Fortune* magazine once estimated Pooh's annual home-entertainment and merchandise earnings at \$1 billion. But a beautifully realised sequel, after years of Pooh cheapquels, is cause for celebration, even if the hunny is, regrettably, just the sweetening on the munny.

➔ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Peter Del Vecchio
Clark Spencer
Story
Stephen Anderson
Clio Chiang
Don Dougherty
Don Hall
Kendelle Hoyer
Brian Kesinger
Nicole Mitchell
Jeremy Spears
Based on the Winnie the Pooh works by A.A. Milne, E.H. Shephard
Director of Photography
Live Action Production:
Julio Macat
Editor
Lisa Linder Silver
Original Score by/Original Score
Produced by
Henry Jackman
Original Songs by
Kristen Anderson-Lopez
Robert Lopez

Sound Designer
Todd Toon
Partner Studio
Yowza Animation Inc.

VOICE CAST

John Cleese
narrator
Jim Cummings
Winnie the Pooh
Bud Luckey
Eeyore
Craig Ferguson
Owl
Jack Boulter
Christopher Robin
Travis Oates
Piglet
Kristen Anderson-Lopez
Kanga
Wyatt Dean Hall
Roo
Tom Kenny
Rabbit
Jim Cummings
Tigger
Huell Howser
Backson

SYNOPSIS The Hundred Acre Wood, 1960s. Pooh has no honey, and Eeyore's tail is missing. Christopher Robin stages a contest to find a replacement tail, with honey for the winner. All the options backfire. Owl thinks a note left by Christopher Robin means that he's been taken by the Backson monster. The animals lay a trail to a pit to catch it. Hungry Pooh, hallucinating about honey, falls into the pit. The others, except Piglet, fall in while trying to rescue him.

Piglet meets Tigger dressed as the Backson and they also fall into the pit. Pooh and the animals climb out, making a ladder of letters fallen from the story's page in the book. Christopher Robin appears, explaining that his note said 'Back soon'.

Pooh spots Eeyore's tail on Owl's bell-pull. He opts to give it back immediately rather than stop for honey at Owl's. Christopher Robin awards him a giant pot of honey for thinking of his friend rather than his stomach.

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Production Companies
Walt Disney Pictures presents
Walt Disney Animation Studios
Executive Producer
John Lasseter

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDS
In Colour
US prints by

DeLuxe
International prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)
6,591 ft +0 frames



Suburban tale: Amy Ryan, Paul Giamatti, Burt Young, Bobby Cannavale, Alex Shaffer

Win Win

USA 2011

Director: Tom McCarthy
Certificate 15 105m 55s

Having already proved himself as a writer-director of soulful comic drama with *The Station Agent* (2003) and *The Visitor* (2007), Tom McCarthy turns to suburban New Jersey for this story of a down-on-his-luck lawyer who moonlights as a high-school wrestling coach.

Unable to pay to fix the plumbing that sends embarrassing guttural groans resonating through his practice, Mike Flaherty (Paul Giamatti) sees a chance to improve his ailing fortunes by offering to act as the guardian of an elderly client facing senility. Pocketing the regular court payments, Flaherty puts his charge into a home but ends up instead accommodating the man's grandson Kyle (Alex Shaffer), an errant

teen fleeing a broken home. This develops into a win-win situation for Flaherty after the scruffy youth reveals himself to be a skilled wrestler, fit for rescuing the lawyer's lacklustre team from the doldrums.

Like the emotionally floundering Connecticut college professor in *The Visitor*, whose life acquires new impetus after he befriends a couple of illegal aliens living in his Manhattan apartment, Flaherty – initially acting out of self-interest, or at least the imperative to provide for his family – is revived by his encounter with the rebellious but talented teenager. To start with, both Flaherty and his wife Jackie (Amy Ryan) are wary of having Kyle to stay ("We have kids," explains Amy, locking the door to the basement where their guest is sleeping, "I'm not taking any chances with Eminem down there"), so there's something schematic about the way Kyle turns out to be the most genuine and honourable character in the story, against whom Flaherty's petty dishonesty is in sharp relief.

SYNOPSIS New Jersey, the present. Mike Flaherty is a struggling small-town lawyer and the coach of a high-school wrestling team. He offers to become the guardian of Leo Poplar, an elderly client with dementia, viewing the attendant benefit payments as a solution to his financial woes. After Mike puts Leo in a home, Leo's grandson Kyle shows up, having fled his mother, who is in drug rehab.

Mike and his wife Jackie put Kyle up at their home. They attempt to return him to his mother but he refuses, subsequently wowing Mike with his wrestling prowess. Mike sees an opportunity for his underachieving side and enlists Kyle. Bolstered by Kyle's presence, Mike's team goes from strength to strength.

Kyle's mother Cindy comes looking for him, but Kyle escapes from the Flaherty house before she can see him. Meeting Mike with her lawyer, Cindy tells him she wants to take Leo back with her to Ohio. Keen to keep his financial lifeline going, Mike informs her that Leo has written her out of his will. Cindy's presence at a crucial wrestling bout angers Kyle and he loses the match.

Cindy tells Kyle that Mike is receiving money for supposedly caring for her father. Kyle confronts Mike, who agrees to pay Cindy the court's money; in return she lets Kyle stay with the Flaherty family. Mike quits his legal work and takes a job as a barman.



Hunny coated: 'Winnie the Pooh'

McCarthy's benevolent drama spins a delicate web of human interests, pulled this way and that by contrary motivations and feelings. The audience is never in any doubt that Flaherty is a big-hearted, good-doing man, momentarily lured into malfeasance by opportunity, so his eventual comeuppance is a damp squib. In a film this visually conventional, such drama risks sliding into soap opera, albeit of a pithily written and occasionally hilarious sort. A loveable loser, Flaherty is the kind of role Giamatti could play in his sleep, though he receives memorable comic support from Bobby Cannavale and Jeffrey Tambor as his friends and fellow wrestling coaches, awestruck by their brilliant new prodigy and the streak of luck he brings.

The film is notable for its credible depiction of economic decline as it affects ordinary American lives, and there's no doubting McCarthy's ability to create amiable comedy from well-drawn, everyday situations. But as funny and human as much of *Win Win* is, he seems too concerned to bring the plot's strands to full resolution rather than allowing life its messiness. The ending sacrifices emotional punch for tidiness, making this likeable but bland film too easy to forget.

➡ Samuel Wigley

CREDITS

Produced by
Mary Jane Skalski
Michael London
Lisa Falcone
Tom McCarthy
Screenplay
Tom McCarthy
Story
Tom McCarthy
Joe Tiboni
Director of Photography
Oliver Bokelberg
Editor
Tom McArdle
Production Designer
John Pano
Music by/Guitar/Bass/Keyboards
Lyle Workman
Sound Mixer
Damian E. Canelos
Costume Designer
Melissa Toth

CAST

Paul Giamatti
Mike Flaherty
Amy Ryan
Jackie Flaherty
Bobby Cannavale
Terry Delfino
Jeffrey Tambor
Stephen Vignam
Burt Young
Leo Poplar
Melanie Lynskey
Cindy
Alex Shaffer
Kyle
Margo Martindale
Eleanor
David Thompson
Sternier
Mike Dillillo
Jimmy Reed
Nina Arianda
Shelly
Marcia Haufrecht
Gina Flaherty

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with Everest Entertainment a Groundswell/Next Wednesday Production Made in association with Dune Entertainment
Executive Producers
Lori Keith Douglas
Tom Heller

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

9,532 ft +15 frames

Zombie Undead

United Kingdom 2009

Director: Rhys Davies

Certificate 15 79m 13s

It takes courage to release a sincere zombie film in the wake of *28 Days Later...* (2002) and *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). Danny Boyle's film raised the bar for the genre's production values and convincingly reimagined zombies as fast, hyper-alert savages, while Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's parody has left all movies featuring zombies dangerously exposed to ridicule. The trashy, low-budget zombie film of old may be nearing obsolescence. *Zombie Undead* might have dealt with this problem by putting a novel spin on generic conventions, as last year's *Monsters* did, or at least by playing up its micro-budget credentials for the sake of schlocky fun. Instead, first-time director Rhys Davies gives us a straight serving of zombie film tropes and stock characters without a hint of tongue in cheek or commitment to basic quality control.

The plot sees Sarah (Ruth King) and Jay (Kris Tearse) fighting their way out of a building infested by zombies, neatly reversing the sequence of events in *28 Days Later...* in which the characters are hemmed into increasingly claustrophobic environments. And for once the epidemic doesn't come about by some kind of scientific accident, but is deliberately engineered and imposed on civilisation. Yet these narrative quirks shouldn't be mistaken for originality, because *Zombie Undead*'s story is full of clichés: the zombie outbreak is caused by a virus, the zombies are slow and stupid, important characters are



Ruth King

SYNOPSIS England, the present. A shady man detonates an explosive device in the centre of an unnamed city; a virus spread by the fallout turns people into zombies.

Off-duty paramedic Steve drives Mark – who has been infected and is bleeding heavily – and his distraught daughter Sarah to an evacuation facility on the city's outskirts. The facility is full of patients in Mark's condition. Sarah faints at the gruesome sight. She awakens to find the building seemingly deserted. A zombie attacks her, but is killed just in time by Jay, who warns her that the patients have turned into zombies. The two resolve to flee.

Looking for a way out, they first bump into Steve, then meet three other survivors, Phil, Mary and Casper. Phil reveals that the building has been quarantined and that they have been ordered not to leave. Undeterred, the six continue their search for the exit, but on the way Phil, Steve and Mary succumb to the zombies, and the cowardly Casper runs off. Sarah and Jay escape into the deserted countryside.

As the two rest against a tree, Jay is shot dead by an unseen gunman. Sarah flees to a farm, where she meets a farmer holding a rifle. He tells her that the zombies are everywhere, and explains that he killed Jay because he feared he was one of them. As the farmer fends off another mob of zombies, Sarah runs back to the city, which is crawling with the undead.

sacrificed for the sake of the group...

Nor is the script too interested in fleshing out its characters. Often in zombie (and other monster) films, character development takes place in the lulls between attacks, when the traumatised protagonists open up and spill their guts to each other. Here the only gut-spilling is of the literal kind, and the closest we get to learning a character's backstory is when hapless paramedic Steve (Barry Thomas) reveals, when the lift he's in breaks down, that his biggest fear used to be "being stuck in a lift". It doesn't help that the main characters are generally out-acted by the zombies, who at least don't face the challenge of having to bring Tearse's wooden dialogue to life.

Zero-dimensional characters and a hackneyed plot could perhaps be forgiven if the film at least made us jump. But for most of its duration, *Zombie Undead* only has one shock – the sudden zombie lurch – which is simply repeated every eight minutes or so. For the first hour, Davies tries to keep us ill at ease with fixed CCTV viewpoints, grainy night-vision visuals and some shaky handheld camerawork, but there's just no menace. One outcome is that the final outdoor scenes – framed by a steady camera and calm music – make for an effective contrast, and the sudden twist at the end is genuinely shocking. ➡ Alex Dudok de Wit

CREDITS

Produced by
Rhys Davies
Written by
Kris Tearse
Director of Photography
Neill Phillips
Edited by
Rhys Davies
Kris Tearse
Music
The Campbell
Theory
Sound
Carl Horner
Farid El-Jazouli

CAST

Ruth King
Sarah
Kris Tearse
Jay
Barry Thomas
Steve
Rod Duncan
Frank
Christopher J. Herbert

Phil
Sandra Wildbore
Mary
Steve Dolton
farmer
James Lamb
bomber
Steve Bull
dad
Ross Bayliss
Michael
Clive Ward
Dr Riley

©Hive Films
Production Companies
Hive Films
Darkwaters
Entertainment

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

7129 ft +1 frame

CREDITS UPDATE

The review of this film was published in our January issue but credits were unavailable at the time of going to press. We are still awaiting credits for *The Company Men* and *The Dilemma*.

Waiting for "Superman"

USA 2010

Certificate PG 111m 8s

CREDITS

Produced by
Lesley Chilcott
Written by
Davis Guggenheim
Billy Kimball
Cinematography
Erich Roland
Bob Richman
Edited by
Greg Finton
Jay Cassidy
Kim Roberts
Music by/Score
Produced by
Christophe Beck
Animations by
Awesome and Modest
Re-recording Mixer
Skip Lievsay

©Public Education Documentary, LLC
Production Companies
Paramount Vantage and Participant Media present in association with Walden Media an Electric Kinney production
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Diane Weyermann

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

10,002 ft +0 frames



"Waiting for "Superman""

Cars and boats and trains

The early films of Japanese master Naruse Mikio reveal a conflicted relationship with modernity, says **Brad Stevens**

Silent Naruse

Flunky, Work Hard/No Blood Relation/Apart from You/Every-Night Dreams/Street Without End

Naruse Mikio; Japan 1931/32/33/33/34; Criterion/Eclipse/Region 1; 28/79/60/65/88 minutes; Features: new scores by Robin Holcomb and Wayne Horvitz, sleeve notes by Michael Koresky

The Criterion Collection is renowned for its lavish DVDs, filled to overflowing with meticulously assembled extras. Its sister label Eclipse was started in order to release barebones collections of films not considered worthy of such treatment, but this supporting act has now become more interesting than the main show. For me, Eclipse's latest box-set, 'Silent Naruse', is its finest yet.

For many years, Naruse Mikio has been something of a legend among western aficionados of Japanese cinema. He was, we were frequently informed, one of the cinematic masters, yet his large body of work (89 films, of which 22 are lost) was virtually invisible outside Japan. This situation has thankfully now changed, thanks to several retrospectives, DVD box-sets issued by Masters of Cinema and the BFI, and the efforts of file-sharing websites whose members have created English subtitles for the bulk of Naruse's oeuvre.

Given the sheer weight of expectations that accompanied our belated exposure to Naruse, it would hardly be surprising if we had initially found his work something of a disappointment. On the contrary, many cinephiles now regard him as fully the equal of Mizoguchi and Ozu. Perhaps the reason Naruse has taken so long to arrive on foreign shores is that his style isn't immediately identifiable: though he shares Mizoguchi and Ozu's concern with women attempting to define themselves in the face of patriarchal oppression, his *mise en scène* has more in common with that of such self-effacing American classicists as Howard Hawks and Leo McCarey. Indeed, it's possible to watch Naruse's films without being consciously aware of style as such – which perhaps explains why exposure in international arthouse markets, where overt visual styles are seen as handy promotional tools, has been so long delayed.

Which isn't to say that there are no identifiably Narusian stylistics. One of the director's favourite images involves two people walking and talking while the camera tracks to follow them from a slightly frontal position (there are early examples of this in 'No Blood Relation'



Child of the times: 'Every-Night Dreams'

Many cinephiles now regard Naruse as fully the equal of Mizoguchi and Ozu

and 'Street Without End'). Naruse was always happiest when observing personalities and societies in states of transition (he functioned just as effectively in the war and occupation periods as he did during times of supposedly greater freedom), and his tracking shots privilege conversationalists who, far from being trapped inside their own solipsistic viewpoints, actively engage with the person they're speaking to, the sense of growth and change these individuals are capable of conveyed by the camera's constant forward movement (scenes in which characters fail to engage in this way are shot in a quite different style, usually as a series of isolated close-ups). It is this sense of dynamic progression that distinguishes Naruse's finest films.

Eclipse's collection contains all five of Naruse's surviving silents (19 titles from this period, including the director's first seven films, are no longer extant), the earliest of which, a short with the wonderful title 'Flunky, Work Hard' (1931), also contains the first known example of those traffic accidents that appear throughout the oeuvre and can be found in three of the other films collected here, 'No Blood Relation' (1932), 'Every-Night Dreams' (1933) and 'Street Without End' (1934). These often fatal collisions provide the best evidence of Naruse's conflicted relationship with that modern world represented by cars and trains. 'Apart from You' (1933) is the only film in this set whose characters are not laid low

by moving vehicles, but it still uses forms of transport to demonstrate Naruse's ambiguous attitude towards modernity (the main concern of Catherine Russell's indispensable book 'The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity'). An early scene shows a teenager named Yoshio lying by a railway line as trains, those indispensable representatives of progress, move across the screen in the background, suggesting the dreams of escape in which this truant is indulging. Later, Yoshio and the young geisha Terugiku take a train to visit the latter's parents in a harbour village, where they talk by the sea (boats, emblems of a more traditional Japan, float motionlessly in the background) and Terugiku expresses her desire to "go somewhere far away" – a wish both realised and cruelly undermined by the film's climax, in which she is obliged to catch a train that will take her 'far away' to an unspecified location where she will endure a life of prostitution.

Unsurprisingly, the condition of the five prints is highly variable, with 'Flunky, Work Hard' and 'No Blood Relation' showing obvious signs of damage, but on the whole the picture quality is quite satisfactory. The films have newly recorded scores by Robin Holcomb and Wayne Horvitz which are appropriately understated. It is to be hoped that Eclipse will eventually release more Naruse anthologies: in an oeuvre so full of masterpieces, it's hard to single out individual titles deserving of release, but it would be especially nice to see the sublime 'Husband and Wife' (1953), as well as some of the director's underrated comedies, such as 'Five Men in the Circus' (1935), 'Travelling Actors' (1940) and 'Conduct Report on Professor Ishinaka' (1950).

Bedevelled

Jang Chul-soo; South Korea 2010; Optimum Releasing/Region 2; Certificate 18; 115 minutes (Blu-ray)/111 minutes (DVD); Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: production featurette, trailer

Film: As America is to the western and Hong Kong to the martial-arts film, so South Korea is increasingly associated with violent revenge-based melodramas, and if *Bedevelled's* marketing campaign was under review instead of the film it would be tempting to dismiss it there and then. But Jang Chul-soo's stylish debut does at least attempt something different, interweaving the genre's traditional eye-for-an-eye elements with a much subtler exploration of themes of guilt and personal responsibility. Fastidious salarywoman Hae-won (Ji Seong-won) visits her old friend Bok-nam (Seo Yeong-hie) on her native island of Moo-do, a practically medieval environment compared with what she's been used to, in which misogyny is embedded deep in the local psyche regardless of gender. But Hae-won has left Seoul to avoid being called as a witness to a serious crime, and similarly turns a blind eye to the increasingly blatant abuse and exploitation of Bok-nam – until her silence makes her effectively complicit, and therefore a legitimate target when Bok-nam finally snaps.

Disc: The Blu-ray wasn't supplied for review, but even the DVD offers superb picture and sound. (MB)

Blow Out

Brian De Palma; US 1981; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC; 108 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: new interviews, photographs, trailer, essays (including Pauline Kael review), 'Murder à la Mod'

Film: The self-knowing, ultra-topical, character-focused Brian De Palma movie everyone can agree on, *Blow Out* strikes a balance that has eluded the director for most of his career – between his hyperbolic neo-Hitchcockian style hijinks and the demands of orthodox narrative conviction. And the achievement was not overlooked in its day; audiences took it for the racy post-Watergate thriller it seemed to be, while critics delighted in the Antonioni shadowplay, movie-movie winks and elaborate tracking shots. Today *Blow Out* plays as both one of the Reagan era's freshest Hollywood expressions of ambivalence, and a film haplessly, helplessly dated with the period's let's-rework-*Vertigo*-again clichés. The tensions built into the film itself are its most fascinating traits – the combat between believable and outrageously silly textures, hermetic film-school techno-expertise and populist pandering, art-film borrowings and cheap genre-flick luridness.

Of course, it's a seductive ride, beginning with the famous slasher-film-within-a-film, to set piece after set piece, including one of De Palma's most relaxed and eloquent triumphs, in sweet split-screen compositions: John Travolta's amiable sound man parsing

out his night landscape via his shotgun mike and headphones, making his own mental movie from haphazard voyeurism, fauna capture, ambient atmospherics and, eventually, the chance recording of an explosive accident.

For a fast, fun movie about cinema's slippery struggle with verifiable truth and persistent fantasy (and, it should be noted, the last of the classic political conspiracy thriller-satires of the era), De Palma's is properly full of Chinese boxes, in which pieces of audiotape and celluloid come to 'mean' virtually anything – except what they literally represent. Beyond this tantalising derma of ingenuity and Antonionian ontology, and given the unarguable pleasure of Travolta's best and most convincing leading performance, we have the troubling matter of De Palma's pulpish excesses, manifest in much of the dialogue, acting and humour, which can be wincingly crude if we're not in fact deciding that the filmmaker is consciously mocking an imagined audience dumber than ourselves.

But De Palma often seems at times entirely sincere in *Blow Out*, for the first time, and that makes the film feel urgent and humane as well as ironic and clever, which is why, one suspects, it lingers in the brainpan long after most of his other movies flare and then wither in the memory. Take the unforgotten penultimate scene: Travolta sitting on a park bench in the snow, listening to his recording, starting into the distance, approached by De Palma's camera from the back, as if not to disturb him. Where else in the filmmaker's career did he pause to truly consider grief?

Discs: The characteristic Criterion battery of supplements is focused largely on the mechanics of the film's making – De Palma being nothing if not a hobbyist – but the prize here is his first feature, *Murder à la Mod* (1968), a crazy New Wave Gordian knot focusing on a nude filmmaker/photographer, a young model who has crossed his strangely guilt-ridden path, her fashionista pal (satiric jabs at late 1960s fashion idiocy evoke *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?*) and William Finley as a Harpo Marx-like actor/stalker who may be killing women with an ice-pick. Skipping back and forth in time, repeating scenes from various perspectives and quoting before the fact at least a half dozen other



Blow Out Urgent and humane as well as ironic and clever, it lingers in the brainpan long after most De Palma movies flare and wither in the memory

De Palma films (from *Carrie* to *Dressed to Kill* to *Snake Eyes*), this nutty artefact has more Rivette and Godard in it than Hitchcock, and proves that for a moment De Palma was the most French filmmaker in America. (MA)

Death Note/ Death Note: The Last Name

Kaneko Shusuke; Japan 2006; 4 Digital Asia/Region 2; Certificate 15; 121/135 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: making-of featurettes, production diary videos, press conferences, trailers

Film: Adapted from a manga (and an anime), this is an epic-length two-part film rather than a movie with a sequel. Criminals mysteriously drop dead of heart attacks, mostly after escaping official punishment but some while behind bars. The Tokyo police theorise that the deaths are unnatural, the work of a mystery man nicknamed Kira who has an unsurprisingly high popularity rating with the man in the street. 'L', an equally mysterious master-detective who communicates with other law-enforcement types via computer link, is called in as a

consultant. Flashbacks reveal that Kira is actually Light (Fujiwara Tatsuya), the law-student son of the chief cop on the case, who has come into possession of a magic notebook associated with Ryuk, a giant floating death god who retains the cartoony look of the manga character. If Light writes a person's name in the book while thinking of their face, that person dies – and if he elaborates on the circumstances of their death, he can delay it and puppeteer complex scenarios. But he needs to know the name, and see the face. His arch-enemy turns out to be his mirror image: L (Matsuyama Kenichi) is another pouting, floppy-haired student genius, a chocolate-munching compulsive. As Light/Kira becomes more callous and maniacal, the emo detective engages him in a complex chess game which involves a web of other characters and a set of engagingly complicated tricks with the 'rules' of the deadly notebooks. It's a very satisfying epic supernatural mystery, at the heart of an enduring franchise that has yet to be buried by a Hollywood remake.

Discs: Excellent transfer, with separate discs for each part and two more for the extras. (KN)

The Molly Dineen Collection Volume 1

Home from the Hill/My African Farm/Heart of the Angel/In the Company of Men

UK 1987-95; BFI/Region 2; Certificate 15; 300 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1;

Features: 'Home from the Hill' director's cut, interview with Molly Dineen on the making of 'Home from the Hill' and 'My African Farm', unseen footage from 'Heart of the Angel', interview with Dineen and Major Crispin Black on the making of 'In the Company of

Men', booklet featuring new essays and notes with contributions from Eddie Mirzoeff and Stella Bruzzi

The cliché 'fly on the wall' could not be less appropriate for the documentaries of Molly Dineen. Her films feed on moments when institutions are in the midst of crisis or systemic change, but examined from the bottom up: the day-to-day cynicisms, apathies, hardened attitudes and boredom that lead to stagnation. She embeds herself in her given milieu, directing from behind the camera with only a sound recordist (Sarah Jeans) in tow. Often she isolates individuals in a private setting – a small workplace annexe, a bedroom – forcing an intimacy that requires them to open up, eliciting deep psychological insights. The fact of being a woman stepping into a succession of male worlds must be a factor as well.

Opening the first of three Dineen DVD collections planned for release by the BFI this year, *Home from the Hill* (1987) is a masterful observational documentary that stands for the wider picture of the guttering candle of African colonialism. Colonel Hilary Hook, a former cavalryman, and by the 1980s living an unfeasibly idyllic life in Kenya, is evicted by his 'nouveau riche' black landlord and moves back to Blighty. From the cut between Hook's sun-baked lawn and his drive from Heathrow along grey ring-road housing estates to a poky rented flat, the screen becomes a theatre of collapsing illusions. Accustomed to daily service by his black staff, Hook wrestles with a tin opener and can't change a plug. The great white hunter struggling to retain sang froid while being reduced to a helpless child makes for gripping and emotive television.

Heart of the Angel (1989) looks at one of London's busiest underground stations just before its modernisation, and shows a way of life already vanished, where ticket sellers can say "all the breast" to a female caller and stations have lift-operators – the one at Angel station in Islington has been driven insane, cheerily asking passengers whether the world is round or flat. Add a despairing station manager who prefers "wild and lonely places" and a morose ticket seller propelled into Beckettian speculations about the purpose of life, and you have the ingredients of a dysfunctional system about to be swept clean. Dineen gets down and dirty with the Tube's creatures of the night – track-cleaning 'fluffers' and sweating repairmen – in a film that portrays Angel as successive circles of hell.

The three-part BBC series *In the Company of Men* (1995) shows the daily life of Welsh guardsmen on tour of duty in Northern Ireland, pre-ceasefire. The indomitable Major Crispin Black is the 'star', delivering royal bollockings and summing up their position as "one of the most modern armies in the world living in a fort waiting for the Apaches to come". The first episode, 'The Commander', is the most coherent and tense; elsewhere Dineen is somewhat hampered by a prohibition on filming exercises or members of the RUC. But



Support act:
'Bedevilled'

NEW RELEASES

the tensions and symbioses between privates and officers, discipline and disorder, are trenchantly captured. (RY)

Early Kurosawa

Sanshiro Sugata/The Most Beautiful/Sanshiro Sugata Part Two/They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail/No Regrets for Our Youth/One Wonderful Sunday

Kurosawa Akira; Japan 1943/44/45/45/46/47; BFI/Region 2; Certificate PG; 76/82/79/57/106/105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet, deleted scenes from 'Sanshiro Sugata'

Films: The first thing to note about the BFI's compilation of Kurosawa's first six features is that it's a mixed bag, and that's putting it mildly. But the value of such an exercise is emphasised by the fact that it would be impossible to repeat for Mizoguchi, Naruse or Ozu, whose catalogues are riddled with tantalising and probably now unpluggable gaps. Although Kurosawa's debut *Sanshiro Sugata* was cut in 1944 and the missing footage never recovered, the others have been preserved intact, facilitating the fascinating spectacle of a cinema giant visibly finding his creative feet.

Kurosawa's nascent talent is clear from *Sanshiro Sugata* itself, whose by-the-numbers plot about a judo expert boosting both his physical skills and his

understanding of their underlying philosophy is enhanced by an already acute awareness of the importance of stillness and the surrounding environment (landscape, weather) when staging even notionally fast-paced action. After this promising start, Kurosawa's next two features were badly compromised by external circumstances. *The Most Beautiful* is a bizarre cross between a generic women's picture and strident imperialist propaganda, as female factory workers put their physical and mental health on the line in order to meet impossible quotas which they themselves have demanded out of patriotic fervour. It's more interesting for its snapshot of the late-WWII Japanese mindset than as compelling drama in its own right, though it does show Kurosawa's gift for drawing touching individual performances out of ostensibly single-minded groups.

It's certainly better than *Sanshiro Sugata Part Two*, an ill-advised sequel whose crass anti-Americanism (elegant and sophisticated judo and jujitsu versus primitive and violent US boxing) would be embarrassing even from a hack. Made within months (though its release was delayed by censorship until 1952), *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail* is a substantial advance. Despite the menace hinted both by its title and



Swede sensation: Ingrid Bergman in 'Intermezzo'

its central scenario about a group of undercover samurai disguised as Buddhist priests to evade possibly fatal detection, Kurosawa's first samurai film is also partly a broad comedy, though the clowning of the group's porter turns out to be more methodical than first appearances suggest.

No Regrets for Our Youth is less immediately recognisable as a Kurosawa film but it raises the artistic bar higher still, not least for the feisty lead performance by Ozu's future muse Hara Setsuko as a woman who moves from radical student politics in the 1930s to disillusionment and denunciation a decade later. Here, the political and historical backdrop is meticulously defined (unusually so for Kurosawa), as is the gulf between privileged students with time to theorise and the backbreaking labour of rice-farming peasants.

The collection's oddity is *One Wonderful Sunday*, which fuses a Capra-esque romance with an almost neorealist portrait of living and working conditions in post-war Tokyo. Two lovers spend a Sunday together on a budget of just 35 yen, only to hit obstacles ranging from predatory petty capitalism (a ticket tout denies them concert tickets, a café rips them off) to their own fears about their future. Stylistically, this is the most adventurous film in the set, at one point even breaching the fourth wall – and the seemingly incongruous use of Schubert (not just in the slightly overstretched climax but peppered throughout the score) offers a sweetly melancholic accompaniment.

Discs: The BFI spreads the films across four discs in roughly chronological order, though the two *Sanshiro Sugata* pictures are understandably paired. Sourced from Toho's own high-definition masters, the prints are in variable shape, ranging from very good (the post-war titles) to frankly terrible (*Sanshiro Sugata Part Two*). However, the transfers themselves are fine, and the optional English subtitles are a considerable advance on Asian-label DVD releases, one of which notoriously translated 'judo' as 'kung fu'. Eleven minutes of deleted scenes

from *Sanshiro Sugata* compensate for the fact that the feature itself is unavoidably truncated. *S&S* contributor Philip Kemp contributes the booklet essay, which thankfully doesn't soft-pedal the films' faults. (MB)

Gamera vs Gyaos/Gamera vs Viras/Gamera vs Guiron/Gamera vs Jiger

Yuasa Noriaki; Japan 1967/68/69/70; Shout! Factory/Region 1; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: Japanese and English audio, publicity materials

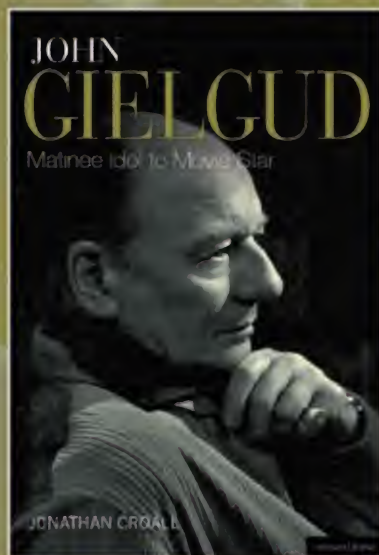
Films: Gamera was Daiei Studios' answer to Toho's Godzilla. He's a giant prehistoric turtle with huge tusks, sometimes mistaken for a flying saucer because he wheels through the air with flames shooting out of the limb-holes in his shell. A misunderstood menace in his film debut, he reformed in sequels and became a protector of the earth, fighting off a series of increasingly bizarre foes, and friend to all children. Toho *daikaiju* (giant monsters) at least initially paid lip-service to plausible anatomy, but Daiei adopted an anything-goes approach and came up with Gyaos (a giant bat with a sonic laser in its mouth), Viras (a squid alien with a scowling beak), Guiron (a giant living knife) and Jiger (a squat dinosaur which shoots spears from horns). In each of these annual monster rallies, a new threat to earth appears, a new bunch of kids befriend Gamera and need rescuing, Gamera is beaten in a first bout (only Jiger thinks to do the obvious thing and flip him on his back) and then comes back in the finale to see off the upstart creature.

It's alternately charmingly daffy and shrilly camp, but delivers things you won't find in any other movies – like the kids exploring Gamera's insides in a yellow submarine, a monster who needs to be defeated because he's a threat to the then topical Expo '70, brain-eating women from another world, and a cheery children's song egging on the nation's favourite turtle.

Discs: These films have been misrepresented by various 'public domain' issues of the cropped, dubbed versions made for American television,

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but now at least look wider and more colourful in decent transfers with the original audio. The rest of the series has been issued by Shout! Factory, with extras confined to the earlier standalone discs of *Gamera the Giant Monster* and *Gamera vs Barugon*. (KN)

Ingrid Bergman in Sweden

Intermezzo/A Woman's Face/June Night

Gustaf Molander/Gustaf Molander/
Per Lindberg; Sweden 1936/38/40;
Kino/Region 1 NTSC; 88/96/85 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Films: Revisiting these unassuming, programmatic old Swedish melodramas is a bit like walking in David O. Selznick's shoes, for this is where, like a torchlight out of a cave's grey shadows, came the apparition of a young, flawless, clarifying Ingrid Bergman. She strides through these films with a primal rapport with the camera, and besides being dazzled by her simple, often stultifying beauty, you can see here the basic tools she had in her arsenal, which made her more or less instantly one of the world's great screen presences: a slim, wide-shouldered frame that exuded schoolgirl confidence; a vulnerability that, when it bruises into suffering, is so affecting it can make your head ache; and that gaze, which held like gravity even as it radiated heartbreak or tragedy. Her Svengali in Sweden was Gustaf Molander, an essentially bland shopsmith whose undistinguished and largely unexported career stretched over four decades; it was his tearjerker love story, *Intermezzo*, that stirred Selznick's juices, and before long Bergman was on her way to Hollywood for the remake. Gregory Ratoff's 1939 version is certainly superior to Molander's – savvier, slicker, more subtle – and Leslie Howard makes for a more appetising romantic lead than the rheumy-eyed Gösta Ekman. But seeing Bergman light up this dim room remains a sight to behold, and Selznick's hungry yen is still palpable.

Molander's *A Woman's Face* is another kind of genre indulgence, an odd pre-*noir* (remade in Hollywood in 1941, but with Joan Crawford) in which the unlikely Bergman plays the scar-faced head of a blackmailing ring; once her face is restored by a charitable surgeon, she finds herself in the middle of another scam, posing as the (now hot) governess in the home of a kindly millionaire, but craving a life free of crime.

June Night, released in Sweden seven months after the *Intermezzo* remake appeared in America, has Bergman playing another emotionally scarred woman, already almost murdered by a lover, trying to reinvent herself in Stockholm and battling the ghosts of the past. Clearly, in Sweden and only for a few years, Bergman got to play roles that in Hollywood would go to the likes of Crawford and Joan Bennett, before the persona we all treasure – soft-spoken, cultured, kind – was cultivated and maintained by the studios. Still, her natural warmth is never difficult to see in any context,

Indian summer

James Bell on the cracking yarn that tempted Fritz Lang out of retirement – and influenced Spielberg and Lucas

Fritz Lang's Indian Epic

Der Tiger von Eschnapur/Das Indische Grabmal

Fritz Lang; Germany 1959; Eureka/
Masters of Cinema/Region 2; 101/102
minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features:
German-language and English-language
track, commentary by David Kalat,
making-of documentary, 8mm footage
shot on location, essay by Tom Gunning

By the late 1950s Fritz Lang's patience with Hollywood was exhausted; his will to battle with yet another meddling producer – power struggles that Lang, now in his mid-sixties, once relished – had collapsed. It was the combustible experience of working with Bert E. Friedlob on his last two American pictures, *'While the City Sleeps'* and *'Beyond a Reasonable Doubt'* (both 1956), that provided the final nails, the pair clashing bitterly throughout production.

Salvation briefly seemed to arrive when Lang was approached to work on *'The Pearl of Love'* in India, a story first developed by Alexander Korda and David Lean, about the building of the Taj Mahal, but the project fell apart. By 1957, Lang would tell anyone who asked that he had retired from filmmaking.

Things may have stayed that way had Lang not been approached by a young German producer and ardent admirer named Artur Brauner, who proposed to Lang that he return to India to shoot a remake of a long-mourned project called *'Das Indische Grabmal'*, an epic adventure story inspired by the orientalist fantasies of the German writer Karl May, which (apparently unbeknown to Brauner) Lang had himself written with his then future wife Thea von Harbou in 1920 from von Harbou's original novel, only to have it taken from him by producer Joe May. So angered was Lang that he left May's company, going with von Harbou to the Ufa studios, where the pair found



The Wild East: Walter Reyer as the Maharaja Chandra and Debra Paget as the dancer Seetha

unprecedented artistic success through the 1920s before their marriage soured as von Harbou attached herself to Nazism and Lang fled for the US.

It's easy then to see the irresistible attraction the prospect held for Lang; here was the chance both to return to Germany and also to mark that return symbolically by reclaiming a story and a style – epic in scale, combining adventure, fantasy and myth – that he had last tackled in 1920s silent epics such as *'Die Niebelungen'*. Lang described it as "the closing of a mystic circle".

Brauner was a refreshingly sympathetic producer, despite Lang's demanding perfectionism inflating an already huge budget. The film was shot on location in India and in studios in Germany, and was a true epic, with hundreds of local extras, vast sets and elephants and tigers. It eventually ran to over three hours, and was released in two parts, designed to play over consecutive nights (a savagely truncated version – disowned by Lang – was released as a single film in the US). The story is pure escapism, centred around a beautiful Indian dancer

(played by Debra Paget – her looks explained in the film by her having an Irish father) in love with a dashing European architect but courted by the ruthless Maharaja of Eschnapur (again, played by a westerner). Undeniably, the film has its kitsch, camp appeal, and though it was a huge box-office hit, was dismissed by German critics (and some directors of the New German Cinema, such as Volker Schlöndorff and Alexander Kluge) as evidence of how far Lang had fallen, compromised into making childish, anachronistic films unworthy of his stature. It had a better reception in France, where the *'Cahiers'* group were quick to praise it, recognising Lang's touch in the masterly use of small details and space, and the sense of malignant surveillance in the maharaja's labyrinthine palace (exteriors of which were filmed at the beautiful Udaipur palace in India). Tom Gunning, in his essay included in the booklet of *Masters of Cinema's* typically superb DVD, also highlights this control of the cinematic space, linking it to a theme common throughout Lang's films – that of victims, often a pair of lovers, caught in a struggle against fate and an oppressive system.

Such readings convince, and the film is unquestionably far richer than it was originally given credit for, but it can also be enjoyed unashamedly as the cracking adventure yarn it is – perfect weekend-afternoon escapism, in the tradition of the Saturday matinee serial. Lang had no qualms about making a big-budget, populist crowd-pleaser, and indeed, the likes of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas both clearly owe him a debt for the *'Star Wars'* and *'Indiana Jones'* films, on which the influence of Lang's great epic is striking – there are action sequences and settings here that are just too familiar to be coincidental.



Far, far away: Lang's India is a colourful orientalist fantasy

When in Rome

There is a ring of truth about Vincente Minnelli's tale of Hollywood has-beens in Italy, writes **Tim Lucas**

Two Weeks in Another Town

Vincente Minnelli; US 1962; Warner Archive Collection/Region 0; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: theatrical trailer

Vincente Minnelli's 'Two Weeks in Another Town', produced by John Houseman and scripted by Charles Schnee, is sometimes described as a sequel to 'The Bad and the Beautiful' (1952), made by those same men and also starring Kirk Douglas – but that's not quite how it works.

In the earlier film, Douglas plays Jonathan Shields, a film producer who claws his way to the top of his profession, using any face he can find for a foothold. In this film he plays Jack Andrus, a former movie star whose career was sidelined when his insane love for a heartless narcissist drove him to attempt suicide by speeding in a sports car through the Hollywood hills. Seven years later he's released from his sanatorium to respond to a summons from his old mentor, director Maurice Kruger (Edward G. Robinson), to come to Rome and re-enter pictures as the dubbing director on a Cinecittà period piece that looks like 'Senso'-lite. To make his web stickier, Kruger screens for Jack one of their grand hurrahs – "a movie that we made because we just couldn't sleep until we made it". A scene from 'The Bad and the Beautiful' then unreels, making Jack the fictional analogue of Kirk Douglas and Kruger a stand-in for Minnelli. "Kruger," Jack says, as the lights come up, "you're great." "I was great," Kruger allows – a sentiment that Minnelli himself, whose own best pictures were by now behind him, likely shared, perfectionist that he was. When Kruger suffers a heart attack and can't finish the picture, Jack buys his way into the director's chair to finish it 'the Kruger way' – only to learn the familiar lesson that no good deed goes unpunished.

'Two Weeks in Another Town' is based on a 1960 bestselling novel by Irwin Shaw, whose career, like that of 'Spartacus' screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, was rescued by Douglas from the tyranny of the Hollywood blacklist. Shaw had previously worked with Douglas on the Italian-made film 'Ulysses' (1954) and based his novel's hero on John Huston, whom he'd observed on the set of 'Beat the Devil', made in Rome the year before. Shaw knew his business, and the picture business; both book and film are splendidly rooted in the factual details and backstage gossip of the 'Hollywood on the Tiber' era. Douglas and Robinson play the sort of middle-aged and older filmmakers Hollywood was sending to



Fallen stars: Kirk Douglas and Edward G. Robinson in 'Two Weeks in Another Town'

Rome by the truckload in those days – veterans like Huston, Raoul Walsh and Jacques Tourneur. The strict, banker-like Italian producer (Mino Doro) and the buxom, machine-gun-tongued leading lady who is also his mistress (Rosanna Schiaffino) could as easily be based on Dino de Laurentiis and Silvana Mangano as on Carlo Ponti and Sophia Loren. The moment when Douglas turns his hectoring star into a docile doe with a swift kick in the pants has the ring of anecdotal truth about it; it must have happened somewhere. And stories of how one director's disability became another's opportunity are numerous in Italian film lore, as when Guido Brignone's illness resulted in Michelangelo Antonioni ascending to the control of the Anita Ekberg sword-and-sandal item 'Sign of the Gladiator' (1959).

I've interviewed numerous people who made films in Rome during this period – including Dahlia Lavi, who plays Douglas's positive love interest here – and they have all told me that, for all its mania and chaos, it was the happiest time in their careers. Despite his and Shaw's tortured (and worthy of being tortured) cast of characters, Minnelli's film reflects this, with Milton Krasner ('Three Coins in the Fountain') photographing the rubbernecks at the Via Veneto, the Spanish Steps, the Trevi Fountain and, of course, Cinecittà – all in Metrocolor and CinemaScope.

Reviewing it for the 'New York Times', Bosley Crowther called 'Two Weeks in Another Town' "as trashy as the worst stuff", meaning the worst stuff coming out of Italy at the time. While it is

The film is splendidly rooted in the factual details and backstage gossip of the 'Hollywood on the Tiber' era

sometimes guilty of taking its melodrama beyond Douglas Sirk into Jacqueline Susann territory, there's too much style and meaning here to simply disregard the whole as trash. The crux of the film is addiction – Kruger's addiction to power, his wife's addiction to reflected glory, and Jack's crippling erotic addiction to Carlotta (Cyd Charisse), a Venus in furs (looking much like Mangano's Circe in 'Ulysses') who lives to taunt and destroy him. Carlotta's control over Jack is played out in awesome strategy, first by a parenthetical detail in his account of their past affair: "We had a thing for green." When Carlotta unexpectedly phones Jack's hotel suite, his slumping shoulders tell us who it is before he speaks her name aloud like someone mesmerised; then Minnelli cuts to an overhead shot of Charisse couched in pillows and silks of the most sickly green. Later, fleeing a party that she's about to turn into an orgy, Jack is halted by a green scarf that falls from the balcony where she's trysting – one of the most delicate yet piercing images of horror you're likely to see.

If Minnelli's vision owes a certain debt to the Roman fantasy of Fellini's 'La dolce vita' (1960), Minnelli repays that debt here at least twofold – first with shots of a mausoleum of grotesques listening to Leslie Uggams sing, more Fellini-esque than anything Fellini himself shot until 'Juliet of the Spirits' (1965); and secondly with Douglas's delirious, terrifying drive through the labyrinthine outskirts of Rome, which surreally careen around his Maserati in blatantly fake background projections – a spectacle that surely lodged in Fellini's imagination as he made his own later exposé of the Italian film industry, 'Toby Dammit' (1968).

Warner Archive's on-demand pressing, available from www.wbshop.com, gives this important film its first anamorphic presentation on home video, vital to an appreciation of its scenic photography. The cover replicates the original Robert McGinnis poster art.

and these films are testaments not only to the force of her personality and skill, but also to the long heyday (stretching the whole century until the Reagan-Thatcher era) when stories about women proliferated on screen.

Discs: Transfer and restorations are all sharp and fresh, but sans extras. (MA)

The Lighthouse

Maria Saakyan; Russia/Armenia 2006; Second Run/Region 0; Certificate 12; 78 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic; Features: booklet, short film 'Farewell'

Film: Initial fears that Maria Saakyan's feature debut would amount to little more than imitation Tarkovsky (mist-drenched landscapes, peeling-plaster interiors, sepia-tinted flashbacks) are quickly dispelled by her own intensely acute feel for the visible and invisible impact of war on domestic, female-dominated spaces, as Lena (Anna Kapaleva) returns to her home village in Armenia in the early 1990s, just before the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict breaks out. This forces her to sift complex emotions between those that can be shared with fellow villagers and those that she has to keep to herself as the designated outsider still trying to make sense of her situation. Meanwhile, others come to terms with their own dramatically altered circumstances, gathering in huddles at the railway station in the (usually forlorn) hope of securing escape somewhere beyond the constantly encroaching fog.

Disc: The director-approved transfer is excellent, though the supporting short (Saakyan's elliptically autobiographical VGK graduation piece *Farewell*) is non-anamorphic. An invaluable context-setting booklet includes two usefully contrasting essays by Vigen Galstyan and S&S contributor Sophie Mayer, offering Armenian (historical/cultural) and British (personal/poetic) perspectives. (MB)

Limelight

Charles Chaplin; US 1952; Park Circus/Region 2; Certificate U; 134 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: introduction by David Robinson, documentary, 'Footlights' excerpts read by Chaplin

Film: Chaplin's nostalgia-steeped, autobiographical evocation of London's music-hall scene, shot on the Paramount lot, remains as affecting as ever, and its formal virtuosity is striking. The opening sequence in which the drunken old comedian Calvero (Chaplin) blunders through the door of his rooming house and discovers the sleeping body of ballet dancer Terry (Claire Bloom), who has just tried to gas herself, boasts some astonishing camerawork from veteran cinematographer Karl Struss (whose career stretches back to FW. Murnau's *Sunrise*).

Chaplin knows how to squeeze maximum emotional impact out of close-ups, whether of a febrile-looking Terry, gazing with devotion at Calvero, or of the careworn clown himself. Watching the film now, you realise how closely many of its themes chime with

those found in Sylvain Chomet's Tati-scripted 2010 animated feature *The Illusionist*. That's not to say Tati's script borrowed from Chaplin's film – rather that they share similar preoccupations: the plight of the clown/magician whose powers are waning, the chaste and trusting relationship between the old magus and his naive young admirer. There are echoes, too, of backstage stories like *A Star Is Born* (1954) and even *The Red Shoes* (1948). This, though, was a deeply personal project for Chaplin. His children appear, his wife Oona is briefly used as Bloom's stand-in, and – as his biographer David Robinson makes clear in an excellent introduction – incidents and characters are drawn directly from his own childhood.

Audiences accustomed to watching Chaplin in his silent films will be surprised to find him in a role in which he talks so much; and those who complain that he isn't funny, or that his comedy is too maudlin, will be wrong-footed by a film in which the plot hinges on the comedian's inability to make his audience laugh any more, and on the unashamedly sentimental portrayal of the comedian's relationship with the ingénue he rescues.

Disc: The DVD version (it's also available in Blu-ray) is perfectly serviceable but doesn't appear to add anything to MK2's recent restoration. There's some excellent newsreel footage of Chaplin returning to Britain for the *Limelight* premiere and attending a Variety Club lunch. (GM)

Lunch Hour

James Hill; UK 1962; BFI Flipside/Dual Format; Certificate U; 63 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: short films by James Hill ('Skyhook', 'Giuseppina', 'The Home-Made Car'), essay booklet

Film: Set just before Larkin's 'annus mirabilis' 1963, John Mortimer's almost-adulterous drama about an illicit rendezvous between nervous London

Mummy's boy:
'Mamma Roma'



The Mikado A gloriously stagey adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera... the pastel-hued Technicolor production design is edible

co-workers is a sharp-eyed snapshot of a society still mired in post-war prudishness but on the brink of swinging. Director James Hill, remembered nowadays chiefly for the wholesome *Born Free* (1966), delivers a pert, playful and partly realist adaptation that can't wholly erase the imprint of its radio-play origins (a verbose script, the odd leaden comedy cameo). But the breezy backstory dominated by Robert Stephens's diffidently guilty courtship gives it a novel twist, topped off by the sly, proto-feminist reversal of Shirley Anne Field's outraged fantasies of marital imprisonment, which supplant the longed-for consummation.

Cosy rather than cutting but with a strong whiff of cultural change (playwright Emlyn Williams remarked to Mortimer, "You just got into the New Wave as the Tube doors were closing"), its zesty exploration of empowering female frustration makes it a thought-provoking addition to the lad-centric catalogue of early 1960s British cinema. **Disc:** A spanking black-and-white transfer, showing off cinematographer Wolfgang Suschitzky's asymmetrical shots and stark close-ups. It's bolstered by a welcome and nostalgic trio of Hill's much loved PR shorts (including the Oscar-winning 'documentary' oddity *Giuseppina*) for British Petroleum, burned into the brains of the country's baby boomers during the years they were shown in heavy rotation as trade test colour films on BBC2. (KS)

Mamma Roma

Pier Paolo Pasolini; Italy 1962; Mr Bongo Films/Region 2; Certificate 15; 102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic

Film: Pasolini's second feature is both a logical follow-up to *Accattone* (whose star, Franco Citti, essentially reprises his role as a pimp) and a fascinating

anomaly in his career, since he would rarely work with major actors at all, let alone international stars of the magnitude of the already Oscar-winning Anna Magnani. But the part of a former prostitute turned conscientious mother of a troubled teenage boy was conceived with her in mind, and adds a powerful moral dimension lacking in the earlier film – its overtly religious imagery, especially at the start and end, would anticipate Pasolini's later work.

Magnani's blowsily florid performance could easily have unbalanced a lesser film, but director and star are in perfect sync, the camera content simply to follow her as she unleashes yet another tirade of lively invective. This is anchored to a typically vivid sense of place, with Pasolini's eye for the derelict beauty of the Roman edgelands at its most acute.

Disc: The excellent transfer maintains the high standards for Pasolini releases already set by Tartan and the BFI. (MB)

The Mikado

Victor Schertzinger; UK 1939; Criterion Collection/Region 1; 91 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: video interviews with Mike Leigh, Josephine Lee and Ralph MacPhail Jr, silent promo for 1926 D'Oyly Carte stage performance of 'The Mikado', deleted scene, excerpts from 1939 radio broadcasts of stage productions 'The Swing Mikado' and 'The Hot Mikado', essay booklet

Film: This gloriously stagey 1939 adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera was produced under the auspices of the D'Oyly Carte company, which received 3,000 letters a week insisting that Hollywood director Victor Schertzinger remain true to the traditional style of the stage productions. Consequently, despite variable attempts at a truncating prologue, extensive cutting of the

work for a nimbler pace and a disconcertingly American lead in crooner Kenny Baker (dubbed 'Yankee Poo' by critics), its chief virtue is as a highly finished record of the stage show (much of it fetishistically preserved from the original 1885 production), right down to the bits of business faithfully imported by Martyn Green's clowning Lord High executioner Ko-Ko. While it spans along, the changes transform Gilbert and Sullivan's waspish black comedy into a stately, soppy operetta with comic inserts, weighed down by Marcel Vertès's baroque Edo-Period-in-Oz costuming. The pastel-hued Technicolor production design is edible, however, and Sydney Granville's pride-puffed Pooh-Bah and John Barclay's manipulative Mikado make the performances fit the medium, so that the punishment fits the crime.

Disc: A really eye-catching transfer, with superb sugar-almond shades instead of the traffic-light reds and greens of its contemporaries. The very minor shortcomings of the soundtrack (a lack of crispness in quieter moments) are presumably down to the limitations of the original materials. The excellent interview extras protest the film's scholarly and artistic importance a little too much (Mike Leigh's stout, frank and fondly detailed defence works best), as if concerned to dispel the suspicion that it's a *Topsy-Turvy* bonus feature that got lucky. Chief curiosity is unit director Thorold Dickinson's controversial deleted scene, a topical tweaking of 'I've Got a Little List' complete with Hitler gags. (KS)

Minnie & Moskowitz

John Cassavetes; US 1971; Mr Bongo Films/Region 2; 110 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: trailer

Film: A synopsis suggests a quasi-screwball comedy about the romantic adventures of the hopelessly mismatched Minnie (Gena Rowlands's refined museum curator) and Moskowitz (Seymour Cassel's extravagantly moustached parking-lot attendant). However, while it's often very funny indeed (Mrs Moskowitz's itemising of her son's shortcomings makes milquetoasts of most rival Jewish mommas), there's no mistaking its director. The film opens with a series of excruciatingly awkward scenes in which Moskowitz deliberately starts barroom fights out of boredom and Minnie flees domestic abuse (meted out by an uncredited Cassavetes, Rowlands's real-life husband) only to end up on the lunch date from hell before being rescued by an unlikely knight in a pick-up truck. Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn weren't saddled with all this psychological baggage, but that's one of the film's core themes: old movie romances are hopelessly ill suited as how-to manuals for people who have to live in the real world.

Disc: A good transfer of a well-preserved print, the rough edges an indelible part of Cassavetes's working methods. (MB)

NEW RELEASES

Once a Jolly Swagman

Jack Lee: UK 1948; Strawberry Media/
Region 2; Certificate U; 89 minutes;
Aspect ratio 1.33:1

Film: The second feature by Jack Lee (brother of *Cider with Rosie* novelist Laurie Lee) makes excellent use of the director's documentary background to add extra depth to what might otherwise have seemed like strictly genre fare. The script (co-written by Jack Lee and William Rose of *The Ladykillers* fame) has a political dimension that you simply don't expect in a movie about motorbike racers – there are references to the International Brigade and the Spanish Civil War, and the factory worker turned speedway champ (played surprisingly effectively by Dirk Bogarde in pre-Simon Sparrow days) turns out to be an ardent trade unionist. The film offers a nuanced portrayal of working-class life, with much more of an edge than, say, *This Happy Breed*, and its perspective on the plight of mothers and wives is also subtler than might be expected. The speedway sequences, filmed at New Cross Speedway Stadium, are shot with great relish and flair.

Jolly Swagman was made well over a decade before the Angry Young Man films of the early 1960s but certain sequences here anticipate moments in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life*.

Disc: Out on DVD for the first time, but a disappointingly barebones release. (GM)

Il posto

Ermanno Olmi; Italy 1961; Mr Bongo Films/
Region 2; Certificate U; 93 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: It says much for the lasting power of Ermanno Olmi's gentle humanist masterpiece that it more than stands up against the very similar but more recent work of Milos Forman, Jirí Menzel, Ken Loach and Aki Kaurismäki. Olmi mines the potentially hackneyed theme of a young man standing on the threshold of work, love and adulthood into something completely beguiling. His protagonist Domenico is in fact utterly without guile, and this is his tragedy: once he's passed through the painstakingly depicted obstacle course that constitutes enrolment into office life, his 'reward' seems to be a future of drudgery occasionally interspersed with petty hierarchical squabbles that achieve byzantine levels of semiotic intricacy. The ghostly New Year's Eve works do is a directing masterclass in itself, encapsulating the essence of youthful disappointment in a single toe-curling set piece.

Disc: The transfer is fine, though flatscreen TV owners might have issues with the interlaced picture. (MB)

This month's DVD releases
reviewed by Sergio Angelini,
Michael Atkinson, Michael
Brooke, Geoffrey Macnab,
Kim Newman, Kate Stables,
and Rob Young

TELEVISION

Land of the Giants – Series 1

Kent Productions/Twentieth Century
Fox/ABC; US 1968-69; Revelation/
Region 2; Certificate PG; 1,409 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: unaired
version of pilot, cast interviews,
presentation reel, raw special effects
footage, booklet

Programme: Before he became cinema's self-styled 'Master of Disaster' in the 1970s, Irwin Allen spent most of the previous decade as a purveyor of brash, garish, deliriously silly and decidedly unscientific small-screen sci-fi and fantasy such as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *The Time Tunnel*. The most popular was probably *Lost in Space*, with its group of space-fearing earthlings stranded on a hostile planet, and this was also the template for *Land of the Giants*, in which (in far-off 1983) a spaceship slips into a parallel world where everyone and everything is 12 times bigger.

Swiftian satire is not easily found here, though there is something faintly allegorical in the early episodes, which depict a totalitarian state filled with giants who only speak in bellowing grunts. 'Ghost Town', in which the little people are trapped inside a toy town and tormented by a cruel teenager brandishing a scary set of orthodontic appliances, is probably the best episode on the set.

Sumptuously produced, this remains a fairly risk-averse piece of juvenilia whose catch-and-release plots quickly become repetitive. **Discs:** Colours pop and fizz in this impressively fresh-looking transfer. Extras include an unaired variant cut of the pilot and 20 minutes of cast interviews culled from the 1995 documentary *The Fantasy Worlds of Irwin Allen*. (SA)

Alan Plater at ITV

Yorkshire TV/Granada/LWT/Central/
ITV; UK 1973-85; Network DVD/Region 2;
384 minutes; Certificate PG; Aspect
Ratio 4:3; Features: 'Calendar People'
interview

Programme: This two-disc set could really only hope to skate the surface of Alan Plater's prodigious and varied output and has sensibly opted to focus in the main on some of his less well-known works, most of which reflect a recurring interest in class warfare. It's a theme neatly illustrated by two similar but contrasting plays, *The Party of the First Part* (1978), starring Michael Gambon as a graphic artist with a fondness for comedians of yesteryear, and *Brotherly Love* (1973), with Ray Brooks and Dennis Waterman as feuding siblings working on the docks.

Both plays provide up-close observations of family life, with the father as the central focus in plots revolving around the fallout from a child's birthday party. The first is the weaker of the two, its somewhat arch depiction of a middle-class family coasting unconvincingly on a ripple of



Traffik Nietzschean perspectivism collides with social Darwinism in this still topical 1989 serial about the international drugs trade

light comic banter. The second sees Plater on more familiar working-class territory, with Brooks moving up the management ladder but losing sight of his objectives while his ne'er-do-well brother resignedly accepts the escalation in his life of petty crime.

A more exotic family nexus is explored in *The Intercorridor* (1983), a melancholy ghost story from Granada's *Shades of Darkness* series with John Duttine as a writer who reconciles a poor country wife with the death of her children. In an episode from *The Loner*, Plater's 1975 trilogy of comic playlets, we see in Les Dawson's unsuccessful search for a functioning ballpoint pen a microcosm of the failure to make the rich and powerful more accountable. Unbowed by the opulence he encounters, when shown a wall covered in stuffed and mounted animal heads, he quips: "They must have been going at a fair lick when they hit the wall."

Following two movie collaborations with director Christopher Miles on the adaptation *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1970) and the biopic *Priest of Love* (1981), Plater's engagement with the life and work of D.H. Lawrence culminated in the TV film *Coming Through*. Made to coincide with Lawrence's centenary in 1985, it alternates between the private life of the man (played winningly by a gaunt Kenneth Branagh) as he woos Frieda von Richthofen (Helen Mirren), who is not only an aristocrat but married, with a fictional story starring Alison Steadman as a devotee of Lawrence's work. In its no-nonsense toughness, deep-rooted humanism and passionate celebration of the sublime and the ridiculous, it stands out among the many pearls in this collection.

Discs: Film and video elements are

generally in good condition, with *Coming Through* looking especially clean and sharp. The sole extra is a 1976 edition of the *Calendar People* talk show, in which Austin Mitchell interviews Plater together with Colin Welland and Alan Ayckbourn. (SA)

Traffik

Picture Partnership Productions/
Channel 4; UK 1989; Acorn Media/
Region 2; Certificate 18; 316 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: text
biographies, picture gallery

Programme: Nietzschean perspectivism collides with social Darwinism in this still topical 1989 serial about the international drugs trade, subsequently remade (twice) in Hollywood as *Traffic*. Bill Paterson plays a Home Office drug tsar tasked with improving diplomatic relations with Pakistan, who is eventually laid low by the revelation that his daughter (Julia Ormond) is addicted to heroin. Their story is crosscut with the tragic experiences in Karachi of a poor opium farmer (Jamal Shah) and the wife (Lindsay Duncan) of a shady Hamburg businessman who has to take over his illegal activities to survive after he's arrested following a massive heroin haul by two determined but scrofulous cops. Her transformation from proud upper-class hausfrau to ambitious kingpin in the international drugs trade, with anti-freeze seemingly coursing through her veins, is utterly transfixing. **Disc:** Although shot on 16mm film this presentation is, due to the surfeit of subtitles, taken from video masters that may be occasionally a little soft and grainy but are otherwise perfectly satisfactory. (SA)

Read



TARDISbound: Navigating the Universes of Doctor Who

By Piers D. Britton, I.B. Tauris,
256pp, paperback, £15.99,
ISBN 9781845119256

Doctor Who has always thrived on multiplicity, unpredictability and transformation in its exploration of kaleidoscopic worlds and shifting characters, and in recent years its complexity has continued to grow. With its triumphant return to TV in 2005, *Doctor Who*'s story was being presented to the world in four different fictional forms, across three different media, with five actors simultaneously playing the eponymous hero. *TARDISbound* is the first book to deal with the TV series alongside the 'audio adventures', original novels and short-story anthologies produced since the 1990s, engaging with both their common elements and distinctive features.

www.ibtaurisc.com



Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult

By Howard Hughes, I.B. Tauris,
328pp, illustrated, paperback,
£14.99, ISBN 9781848856080

Italian filmmakers have created some of the most magical and moving, violent and controversial films in world cinema. During its 20th-century heyday, Italy's movie industry was second only to Hollywood as a popular film factory, exporting cinematic dreams with multinational casts to the world, across multiple genres. *Cinema Italiano* is the first book to offer a comprehensive discussion of this Italian cinema, including both popular and arthouse titles. With more than 350 reviews, the book is illustrated throughout with rare stills and international posters from this revered era in European cinema.

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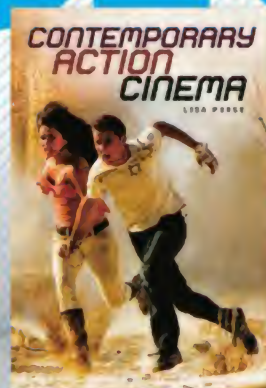


Directory of World Cinema: American Hollywood

Edited by Lincoln Geraghty,
Intellect Books, 223pp,
illustrated, paperback,
UK £15.95 | US \$25,
ISBN 9781841504155

Directory of World Cinema: American Hollywood lays out the cinematic history of Tinseltown, highlighting important thematic and cultural elements throughout. Profiles of many of the industry's most talented and prolific directors provide insights into their impact on Hollywood and beyond. Blockbuster successes – and notable flops – are discussed, exploring the ever-shifting aesthetic of Hollywood's enormous global audience. With a user-friendly layout illustrated with 50 colour images, this volume shows how indispensable the Hollywood film industry is and provides a fascinating account of its cultural and artistic significance as it marks its centennial.

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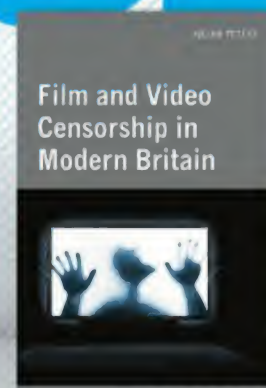


Contemporary Action Cinema

By Lisa Purse, Edinburgh
University Press, 232pp,
illustrated, paperback, £19.99,
ISBN 9780748638185

US action films have a huge international audience but despite this success the genre has received little critical attention: this is the only textbook on the genre covering American films since the 1990s. The US action film has had to alter dramatically in the era of the sequel, the multimedia franchise, the 'War on Terror' and other recent cultural shifts. Lisa Purse explores this evolution and highlights the attributes of the genre, discussing topics such as homosexuality, gender, the body and ethnicity, and exploring British and European connections.

www.euppublishing.com



Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain

By Julian Petley, Edinburgh
University Press, 240pp,
paperback, £24.99,
ISBN 9780748625390

"A necessary, fascinating, meticulous, exasperated book on a thorny subject... full of reasonable good sense in the face of almost surreally unreasonable, hideously entrenched, all-too-horribly British attitudes." (Kim Newman)

How does film and video censorship operate in Britain? Why does it exist? And is it too strict? Starting in 1979, the birth of the domestic video industry – and the first year of the Thatcher government – this critical study explains how the censorship of films both in cinemas and on video and DVD has developed in Britain.

www.euppublishing.com

The power of nightmares

Stephen Thrower *devours a gourmet guide for aficionados of the dark art of horror films*

Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960s

By Kim Newman, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 640pp, £30, ISBN 9781408805039

The first edition of Kim Newman's 'Nightmare Movies', published in 1988, reset the parameters for horror criticism, beginning where previous writers such as Carlos Clarens, Dennis Gifford and David Pirie left off. Newman understood classic horror cinema, chapter and verse, but crucially he also embraced the rough-riding 'exploitation' pictures of the 1970s, finding artfulness in the cream of the crop that a previous generation of critics had overlooked as they squinted at them in distaste.

'Nightmare Movies' advanced the claims to literacy and legitimacy of filmmakers such as Abel Ferrara, Wes Craven and Dario Argento, and even mustered appreciative words for such reviled or neglected outsiders as Lucio Fulci and S.F. Brownrigg. Newman was the first major critic to write a book about the genre after videotape blew the UK film market wide open, exposing audiences to an arterial spray of terrors and wonders from around the world. Rather than flinching from the excess, he drank it up, and he's still eager for more in this new volume, updated and expanded to twice the original length ('New Nightmares' forms the second half of the book, while the older chapters are updated by informative, often wryly amusing footnotes).

The cornerstone of Newman's approach is the detailed mapping of influence, imitation, mutation, parody and pastiche, through the highways and byways of genre cinema and beyond. His forte is enlightened connectivity, a valuable strength given genre critics have a tendency to restrict their vision to the purebred runners and riders. Horror, however, has survived into the 21st century by spreading its ectoplasm into other areas of cinema, creating hybrid forms. This is where Newman comes into his own, able to chart the course of the virus through the mainstream, as well as the horror-for-horror's-sake end of the market. (A committed neologist, he loves to isolate and name micro subgenres that others tend to miss amid the sheer wealth of data.) By taking a panoramic view that incorporates films such as 'Fight Club', 'There Will Be Blood', 'Se7en' and 'Natural Born Killers' as much as it does 'Scream', 'Hostel' and 'Saw', he ensures that the debate remains focused on wider film culture, while steadfastly fighting the genre's corner by appraising



The eyes have it: 'The Silence of the Lambs' was the "defining horror film of the 1990s"

dark-hued mainstream movies as horror, regardless of weasel-word promotional blurbs protesting otherwise.

The first half of 'Nightmare Movies' takes George A. Romero's 'Night of the Living Dead' (1968) as its urtext; for 'New Nightmares' it's Jonathan Demme's 'The Silence of the Lambs' (1990). The cultural shift that swept through the genre between these two films is perfectly summed up when Newman remarks: "In the 1970s, the horror film was oppositional, anarchic and anti-

'In the 1970s horror was anarchic. In the 1980s, it settled down, got a haircut and took a sensible job'



Panic room: John Cusack in '1408'

establishment. It was even disrespectful of its own traditions. In the 1980s, horror settled down, got a haircut and took a sensible job." Throughout a strong chapter, Newman scrutinises not only Demme's "defining horror film of the decade" but also the shockwave of influence that spread out from it, both good and bad. (Commenting on the grim reality of real-life killers as opposed to their glamorously inventive screen counterparts, he comments: "Rather than playing intellectual chess with detective opponents, sociopaths aren't communicating with anyone; for them, murder is masturbation, not sex.")

A page-long riff on a choice quote from the Stephen King hotel-horror film '1408' ("It's just an evil fucking room!") shows Newman at his deadpan funniest, while elsewhere the book is peppered with shrewd insight and no-nonsense erudition (his sympathetic examination of 'The Blair Witch Project' is spot on). Occasionally he loses sight of the fact that few people watch as many movies as he does: he's amazed that anyone was fooled by the twist in 'The Sixth Sense', asking: "Surely after 'Carnival of Souls', 'Jacob's Ladder' and... Ambrose Bierce's 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' the penny should drop ten minutes?" Multiplex audiences might have seen Adrian Lyne's film, but Herk Harvey's? The inclusion of a section about Tim

Burton is also questionable, especially since Newman admits that Burton is incapable of making a frightening film, but the choice is mitigated by a brilliant essay on David Lynch, whose films may defy genre pigeonholing but nevertheless offer some of the most indelible images of true horror in the cinema.

The original 'Nightmare Movies' closed at rather a dispiriting time, when horror movies had gone off the boil, the province of major studios that smoothed away the interesting rough edges to ensure 'R' ratings. The updated book ends with a far more optimistic prognosis – and no wonder: horror, red in tooth and claw, is in fine form thanks to revitalising input from Japan, Spain and France, among other sources. Few critics, however, would know where to start in covering the mass of material that's piled up in the last 20 years. Luckily, Newman is on top of the task. If, like me, you've lost track of a few recent developments in the genre (my own blind spot is Japanese horror), this book is the most detailed cinematic roadmap and gourmet guide on the shelves, finding food for the horror-lover's black soul along motorways, A roads, B roads and dirt tracks alike. 'Nightmare Movies' aims to capture horror's wild and bloody fountain – the fact Newman pretty much pulls it off, leaving even hardcore fans struggling to find the odd droplet he's missed, is a prodigious achievement.

FURTHER READING

The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973

By Tino Balio, The University of Wisconsin Press, 362pp, £24.50, ISBN 9780299247942

In 1945 there were just 18 arthouse cinemas in the US. By 1963, according to Tino Balio, there were upwards of 450. And in October 1959 five Bergman movies were enjoying simultaneous extended runs in New York. Yet by 1972, Dan Talbot, head of indie distributors New Yorker Films, could lament: "Ten years ago you had an arthouse movement in America. There were close to 600 arthouses around the country that devoted themselves largely to foreign films. There's been a tremendous decline... to very close to zero. They've gone over to the commercial product."

Balio charts the rise and fall of this movement, kicked off by the unexpected stateside success of Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*, which, opening at the World Theatre in New York in February 1946, ran for 21 months – longer than previous record holders *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*. Italian films had been screened in America before, of course, but largely shown subtitled in immigrant neighbourhoods. For the first time, exhibitors realised that there might be a substantial audience for foreign-language imports. Over the next three decades, films from Italy, France, Britain, Sweden, Japan and elsewhere carved out a small but highly visible – and influential – niche in the market.

Partly the appeal was intellectual, a level of sophistication appealing to audiences weary of being fobbed off by Hollywood with what Bosley



Sex sells: 'Summer with Monika' was titled 'Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl' in the US

Crowther, all-powerful movie critic of the *New York Times*, described as "the blandest theatrical make-believe". By comparison, foreign films seemed to offer a degree of realism, something rather less sugar-coated. But what the imports could also offer, of course, was sex. Defying or mostly ignoring the Production Code, and confident that their audience would scorn the moralising strictures of the Legion of

Decency, distributors eagerly played up the erotic appeal of their wares. The actress Kyo Machiko (*Rashomon*, *Ugetsu Monogatari*) was bizarrely hyped as "the Jane Russell of Japan"; Bergman's *Summer with Monika* was retitled *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl*, while *Summer Interlude* (*Sommarlek*) became *Illicit Interlude*. The latter even acquired some extra skinny-dipping scenes courtesy of the distributor, Gaston

Hakim, who hired a hack director to shoot them by a lake in New Jersey.

Though arthouses established themselves in every major city and university town, the foreign-film market remained a New York-led phenomenon. "To be considered a success by the trade," Balio notes, "a film had to receive a favourable review from Bosley Crowther and run a minimum of eight weeks in New York; anything less would kill its chances for wider distribution." Crowther's reputation slumped badly after his departure from the *New York Times* in 1968, so it is worth noting that he consistently denounced censorship and championed the screening of foreign films in general, even if his judgement on some of them now seems woefully obtuse. Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* he dismissed as "amusing", and he wondered "whether Mr Bergman himself knew what he was trying to say" in *Wild Strawberries*.

With the disintegration of US movie censorship in the late 1960s, Balio contends, foreign films lost their cachet and the market declined. His account is thorough and conscientious: he takes us through the successive waves of imports as overseas national cinemas peaked and troughed, highlighting key incidents – the Bardot craze, the pro- and anti-dubbing disputes, the *I Am Curious (Yellow)* court cases – and quotes extensively from contemporary US reviewers, but rarely ventures a critical judgement of his own. Only in the last few lines of the book does a personal note suddenly intrude – like a sudden dying blink of sunlight after an overcast day, it makes us realise what we've been missing. ♦ Philip Kemp

Syd Chaplin: a Biography

By Lisa K. Stein, McFarland & Co., 279pp, £35.95, ISBN 9780786460359

What must it be like to be the brother of the most famous man in the world? Lisa Stein's biography is the first, but hopefully not the last, to address the fascinating character of Sydney Chaplin, elder half-brother of Charlie. Sydney's life and career, it is immediately apparent from this straight historical narrative, was inseparable from that of his more famous brother. The relationship was a complex one, ranging from Charlie's simple dependency on Sydney when they were struggling to survive in London as children to a partial reversal of this position in later life when Sydney's once-promising film and business career lay in tatters.

Even though this book concentrates on Sydney's story, the question of the effect of his brother's fame has to be the central one and it is revealing about the age they lived in – the early poverty, the Lambeth workhouse and the low expectations for poor boys in Victorian Britain; the entertainment business that allowed them, by their

own efforts, to break free by following in their parents' footsteps; and their subsequent spectacular success and central role in the rise of Hollywood and the star system.

Through the mass of thoroughly researched detail, Sydney's character emerges, although the author indulges in relatively little analysis, preferring to leave it to the reader's judgement. This fatherless son of a much-loved but mentally incapacitated mother, thrust into the role of carer at an early age, had his own particular talents and failings. He was a very skilled acrobat and slapstick comedian (specialising in the famous 'neck roll', a perilous pratfall involving falling backwards downstairs, ending upside-down on the head and rotating through 90 degrees) who later developed as a lead character comedian in his own films, such as *King, Queen Joker* (1921) and the hugely successful *Charlie's Aunt* (1925) and *The Better 'Ole* (1926).

Big brother: Syd Chaplin



It was Sydney who was the principal success at the Fred Karno company during the brothers' early stage careers but he never had the single-minded ambition or focus of Charlie, and although he followed his brother to

Keystone and made his own series of films, his success was always overshadowed by his brother's so he cheerfully threw himself into business, negotiating Charlie's first million-dollar contract and setting up the

first domestic airline in America. He was also instrumental in developing the structure of United Artists, which symbolised the rebellion of the mega movie stars against the nascent Hollywood studio system. But where he was highly effective on Charlie's behalf, the same could not be said of his own negotiations and in an attempt at a career in Britain he priced himself out of the market, making only one film, *A Little Bit of Fluff*, in 1928.

It seems, however, that it was not Sydney's lesser talent but his sexual peccadilloes that were the principal cause of the demise of his film career. He was a notorious – and out-of-control – womaniser, accused rightly or wrongly of biting off a starlet's nipple during an energetic encounter backstage at British International Pictures. His career never recovered and he spent the rest of his days roaming Europe one step ahead of the tax man and looking after Charlie's affairs as he had always done. There is much more to be said on this intriguing man but Lisa Stein's biography lays the groundwork admirably. ♦ Bryony Dixon

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Letters

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
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Credits crunched

I can entirely understand the decision by *Sight & Sound* to abbreviate film credits in future issues (Editorial, *S&S*, May). Anyone who has watched through all the closing credits of any recent film must have wondered whether we really need to know the names of the catering staff, the drivers, the accountants, as they unroll before a largely empty auditorium – the viewers having left promptly following the film's final image.

However, the availability of credits on IMDb (cited as one reason for this decision) is not a complete substitute for *S&S*'s role as "a journal of record for future researchers". What happens when IMDb goes bankrupt, or the website closes for some other reason? If this happened to *S&S* (heaven forbid!) the back issues would still exist on people's shelves and in reference libraries.

But what happens to data on the internet if there is no longer the finance to sustain its availability? We are cheerfully told that data can now be permanently encoded on one type of electronic chip or another. But if the infrastructure needed for reading these chips becomes obsolete, these memories become irrecoverably lost to us. As the architect and social theorist Rem Koolhaas once remarked "amnesia is at the heart of the digital age".

Peter Benson
London

Cultural imperialism

Among the more interesting details in last month's issue ('North by northeast', *S&S*, May) was the information that Spain, Norway and Greece are the most committed supporters of arthouse cinema. Could this be because they are also among the nations that are the most resistant to American cultural imperialism? From fashion to food to cinema, America has been responsible for the destruction of European intelligence, heritage and style. The Hollywood stranglehold on the production, distribution and exhibition of films is sucking the life out of cinema.

Running on empty?:
Woody Allen



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Making the cut

I am writing to say that I too was saddened to learn, after reading your Editorial (*S&S*, May), that it has become necessary to discontinue printing comprehensive credits in the magazine for every UK film release. Not as saddened as I was when *Monthly Film Bulletin* finished in April 1991 after 57 years and 686 issues, but saddened nonetheless and I sympathise with you that it has been necessary.

Regarding technical credits, you will know that *MFB* gave only the director's name until August 1944, when screenplay and director of photography names were added. In the later 1940s the music credit also appeared occasionally. It wasn't until September 1949, however, that 'full' credits were published for the majority of titles. The credits were never really complete, although with there being so few of them by today's standards they were fairly comprehensive. Credit information certainly waxed in line with the increase in credits available. I don't think it is true, however, to say that it ever waned in the *Bulletin*'s history.

Thank heavens for *S&S* and the BFI for continuing to try to promote and provide an alternative.

Kieron Boote
Stoke On Trent

Style and error

Tony Rayns isn't being entirely fair when he writes that the transliteration of the *Norwegian Wood* lead's name as Matsuyama Ken'ichi, used in *S&S*'s review of that film, "follows no known rule of transcription [sic] from Japanese to English" (Letters, *S&S*, May). He takes issue with the use of an apostrophe to separate the syllables in the actor's given name, but this is a feature of two of the most current systems of Romanisation of Japanese – revised Hepburn and *kunrei-shiki* (the Japanese government's system of choice) – and is more common than the hyphen Mr Rayns proposes.

Mr Rayns also objects to James Bell's description of Matsuyama as a "pin-up", suggesting he wouldn't have done the same of the young Gary Oldman or Tim Roth. I think the term captures the essence of the words *aidoru* ('idol') and *ikemen* ('hunk'), which many Japanese websites and people use with reference to the actor and sometime model. It may well be true that the British media haven't done Oldman or Roth the same kindness.

Alex Dudok de Wit
London

A life in three acts

Not content at thinking Allen's recent movies are "full of confidence and vitality", Brad Stevens further ghosts my flabber



Credits have become a little top heavy and take up a lot of space that could perhaps be put to better use. The idea to print them was certainly an admirable one, but with filmmakers nowadays tiresomely giving a credit to just about everyone involved in a production, attempting to include all the names did become a bit cumbersome. When my wife and I visit

the cinema we are invariably the only people left in the auditorium at the end of the film, which indicates how little the public cares about taking in what for the most part is trivial knowledge.

So even though full comprehensive credits will certainly be missed, I feel the right decision has definitely been made.
Gareth Snowden-Davies
By email

at asking what constitutes 'recent' with this writer-director-star (*S&S*, April). Surely, the Allen oeuvre is as neatly formed into a three-act structure as any in cinema's history. First come the 'early, funny ones' (*Take the Money and Run*, 1969, to *Love and Death*, 1975); we then get the 'golden age' (*Annie Hall*, 1977, to *Husbands and Wives*, 1992); and finally (coinciding with the break-up with Mia Farrow), everything since. Of course, everything since has not been without interest or three or four above-average movies (and perhaps even one good one – *Sweet and Lowdown*?), but more often than not the result is routine or worse (e.g. *Anything Else*, 2003, *Scoop*, 2006, *Cassandra's Dream*, 2007) – pictures which are so devoid of confidence and vitality that they are best ignored.

Alan Maughan
By email

Swan dive

Claire Cussiter's letter regarding your review of *Black Swan* (Letters, *S&S*, April) states that all the female characters in the film are mentally unstable, and goes on to list what is wrong with each of them. According to this list the problem with Mila Kunis's character is that she is "overtly sexualised and manipulative". The notion that overtly sexual and manipulative woman are, by definition, mentally unstable is an extraordinary one to have been accommodated within the author's ostensibly feminist critique. Later, Kunis's character is labelled a "whore", which I assume is meant as archetypal shorthand for "sexually confident woman". This usage seems outdated and I don't understand why

the author would wish to perpetuate it. Darren Aronofsky signally does not condemn this character's sexuality, and I have not heard her referred to as a whore outside of said letter, not even by all those "so-called 'serious' (and mainly male) critics".

Paul Cunningham
By email

In praise of Park

The pen may be mightier than the sword but an axe being grinded by a critic is a much more blunt instrument. In his review of Kim Jee-woon's dazzling *I Saw the Devil* (*S&S*, May), Geoffrey Macnab somehow found room to make three negative references to the films of Park Chan-wook. From the stoic, almost Shakespearean, tragedy of *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance* to the delightfully barmy *Thirst*, Park's films feature narratives of an almost timeless mythical Greek character. Whether his films prove to be as timeless as Greek myths is as yet impossible to determine. But in the meantime they represent a wonderful synthesis of Eastern and Western film practice and a fascinating doorway into the beguiling world of South Korean cinema.

Wendy Shaw
Norton, Stoke On Trent

Additions & corrections

May p.54 *Cold Fish* Cert 18, 145m 53s, 13,129 ft +8 frames; p.59 *How I Ended This Summer* Cert 12A, 129m 50s, 11,685 ft +4 frames; p.63 *Louise Michel* Cert 12A, 94m 38s, 8,516 ft +5 frames; p.66 *Meek's Cutoff* Cert PG, 102m 10s, 9,194 ft +10 frames; p.66 *Passenger Side* Cert 15, 84m 33s, 7,608 ft +15 frames; p.67 *Pina* Cert U, 103m 30s, 9,315 ft +0 frames; p.74 *A Small Act* Cert 12A, 88m 6s, 7,929 ft +0 frames

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